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THE LIFE

OF

JOHN WICLIFF, D. D.

COMPILED FROM AUTHENTIC SOURCES.

BY DANIEL CURRY.

GEORGE PECK, EDITOR.

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PREFACE.

THE name of John Wicliff is familiar to all who have any knowledge, however superficial, of English ecclesiastical history. As a light shining in darkness, he cannot be wholly overlooked, by even the most careless observer of past events. But though his name is well known, and some very indefinite notions of his character are generally entertained, yet the real history of the life and actions of England's first reformer is, even among well-informed persons, but imperfectly understood. His biographers have generally been friendly to his reputation, and to some extent admirers of his character; but till lately their means of information were scanty and fallacious. Among the oldest of his biographies is "An Apology for Wicliff," by Dr. James, who had consulted only such of his manuscripts as could be found in the Bodleian Library. A Life of Wicliff, drawn from original sources, was undertaken by Mr. Lewis,—who styles himself "Minister of Meregate,"—a little more than a century since; but he at the end confessed a want of adequate opportunity to examine his manuscripts. These two were, till within a few years, the only original works relative to the history of Wicliff; and from these, and the perverted accounts of Popish annalists and chroniclers, has been derived the history of the reformer, as found in ecclesiastical histories. But long delayed justice was at length rendered by the publication of "The Life and

Opinions of John de Wicliff, illustrated principally from his unpublished Manuscripts, by Robert Vaughan." The author of that work, with prodigious industry, examined all Wicliff's manuscripts found in any of the libraries in the United Kingdom. His volumes are a complete magazine of facts, lucidly arranged, and discussed with an enlarged liberality, presenting a portrait of their subject that may challenge the admiration of every friend of noble and disinterested virtue.

To that work I am principally indebted for the matter of the following pages. (though some others have been used,) and several of my chapters are little more than abridgments of corresponding portions of those volumes. It has been my purpose to present a clear, correct, and concise statement of the history and doctrines of a man to whom the whole world is largely indebted. The work is now offered to the public, whose candor is solicited, that its imperfections may be overlooked, and its excellences, which belong mostly to others, be properly appreciated. It is designed chiefly for those who cannot avail themselves of larger and more complete works ; and it is hoped that it may become serviceable to many young persons, by finding a place in the libraries of sabbath schools and Bible classes. To render some service to that interesting class of persons is the highest ambition of

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INTRODUCTION.

SOME NOTICE OF CHRISTIANITY IN ENGLAND BEFORE THE TIMES OF WICLIFF.

THE precise time when, and the particular agents by whom, Christianity was introduced among the ancient Britons cannot now be certainly ascertained. That the gospel was preached, and churches founded among them, by the apostles or their companions, is highly probable, nor is that tradition altogether unworthy of credit which ascribes this work to the apostle Paul. Of the extent of ancient British Christianity we have no definite information. On the one hand it had to contend with the civilized paganism of the Romans, and on the other with the barbarous but imposing mythology of the Druids; and everywhere the innate corruptions of the human heart opposed its progress. Yet it took root in the land, and continued to exist among unrecorded vicissitudes till the ancient inhabitants were driven out or enslaved by foreign barbarians. The Saxon invasion brought with it the grim idolatry of the Northmen. The mythologies of the Romans and the

Druïds were banished with the liberties of the people, and Christianity, though more tenacious of life, found a fate scarcely less disastrous. This outpost of heathenism was subsequently brought to at least a nominal Christianity through the proselyting zeal of Gregory the Great. This important mission was intrusted to Augustine—commonly called St. Austin—who, accompanied by a few associates, came from Rome to Britain, and began their missionary labors under the protection of Ethelbert, king of Kent. Conversions were readily effected, for they demanded but little sacrifice, and that lately idolatrous people were speedily transformed into good and true Catholic Christians.

It is reasonable to presume that the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of Britain, however superficial, was a real improvement in their condition, for the worst form of Christianity is better than the least offensive heathenism. Still it is doubtful whether they were under obligation to their new teachers: for had the Papal missionaries failed to reach the shores of Saxon-Britain, it is probable that the faith of the gospel would, at no distant day, have been received by them from a much purer source. Indeed it is known that the ancient British Christians were not inattentive to their duty as lights in the midst of darkness, for in the seventh century the greater portion of the churches of the seven

kingdoms of Saxon-Britain were of British origin. This diversity of origin gave rise to a like diversity of manners and customs, which, becoming offensive to the Romish prelates, gave occasion for acts of uniformity and the usual appliances of persecution. The native teachers refused obedience to the dictation of the Romish missionaries, and neglected to conform in some instances to the Papal calendar. The controversy resulted in the expulsion of the non-conformist teachers from the Anglo-Saxon territories, and the establishment of the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church. No complaint has ever been uttered against the piety, zeal, or learning of these injured patriarchs of Protestant non-conformity. Their only crime was their determination to assert and maintain their Christian liberties—unless, indeed, their piety and purity of life became a crime with their prince, who was attempting to reconcile the conduct of the assassin with the hopes of the gospel.

The expulsion of the ancient clergy—the appointment of Theodore to the see of Canterbury—the rapid diffusion of the monastic spirit, and the custom of making appeals to the Papal court, all conspired to subdue and degrade the spirit of the Anglo-Saxon Church. Yet its subjection was never such as to satisfy the rapacity of the pope: so when the duke of Normandy meditated the conquest of England, a consecrated banner was the significant present of

the bishop of Rome to the invader—which was received by William and his army as a sanction of their enterprise by the head of the church. But though William was pleased to avail himself of the aid of the pope in his ambitious attempts against the liberties of the Anglo-Saxons, he was not willing to surrender his newly acquired authority to his ecclesiastical auxiliary. The most distinguished officers of the church, though holding their places by authority from the holy see, were removed, and their places supplied by the followers of the Conqueror. The authority of synods, and all the more important censures of the clergy, were also made to depend upon his sanction. Indeed, it will be found that scarcely a single prerogative was wrested from the Papacy at the Reformation, and appropriated to the sovereign of England, as visible head of the national church, which was not challenged and exercised by the Norman conqueror. His son and successor was equally sole lord in his own dominions, and made still further inroads upon ecclesiastical property. For several successive reigns, the nation was convulsed by counter claims to the crown, and each possessor of the throne sought to fortify himself by courting the favor of the clergy. Yet the progress of ecclesiastical usurpation was slow and painful. Anselm, who was archbishop of Canterbury in the time of Henry the First, took advantage of the

necessities imposed on the king by a defective title to the throne, to demand a surrender by him of the right of investiture—a claim which the king at first evaded, and at length openly and effectively resisted. The reign of Henry the Second was imbittered to himself and his people, by a contest, not so much with the Papacy, as with the native clergy, and especially his own creature, Thomas à Becket. And although Henry so far triumphed as to procure the death of that proud prelate, yet ecclesiastical usurpation was rather advanced than retarded during that period. But it was not till the reign of King John that priestly ambition attained its complete ascendancy. That prince attempted to exercise the hereditary prerogatives of the crown over ecclesiastical affairs; but the monks of Canterbury knew their man, and began to dispute the royal authority, and, in support of their pretensions, appealed to the Papal court. Though the claims of the English monarch were sanctioned by the practices of his predecessors, yet in consequence of his violent temper, and his imbecility, the result of the contest was, that the kingdom was visited with the sentence of an interdict, and himself with excommunication. Still unmoved, John was next declared by the sovereign pontiff to be no longer king; his subjects were absolved from their allegiance; and all Christian princes were exhorted to aid in wresting the sove-

reignty of England and Ireland from the grasp of a perjured man. Ambition seconded the Papal summons, and the king of France prepared to seize the English sceptre as his own. Alarmed at the array of the enemy's power, and distrustful of the fidelity of his own subjects, John, in 1216. complied with the degrading exactions of the Papacy ; the privileges claimed for the church were granted, and the kingdom itself surrendered to the Papal legate, and received back by the humbled monarch, as a fief of the holy see. As a badge of this odious servitude, an annual tribute of a thousand marks was to be paid to the pope.

Thus was completed the political degradation of England, and the kingdom brought into a slavish subjection to a foreign ecclesiastical court. All that Papal ambition could now desire was the perpetuity of its ill-gotten power. But ambition was not the only passion of the worldly minded churchmen of the middle ages ; and the power which was the end of ambition, soon became the means by which their avarice sought to be gratified. The tribute of fealty only served to sharpen the appetite of the voracious Papacy. Every ecclesiastical office, from the primacy to the benefice of a curate, became the lawful plunder of the all-exacting Roman see. The sums extorted under the name of "fees" became the reproach of Christendom, and the pope sought to ex-

change them for permanent possessions among the ecclesiastical establishments of the kingdom; but as this proposed “commutation” was all on one side, it was successfully opposed by the king and nobles of the realm.

Some subsequent attempts to drain the land of its treasures were more successful. The wars of the crusaders, and that against the emperor who had dared to resist the Papal encroachments, were pleaded as occasions for an ample revenue; and especially the necessity of maintaining the proper dignity of the court of the pontiff, which could not be done without an adequate income. To facilitate this money-gathering business, the whole property of the kingdom was assessed, and all the machinery of the church, its ghostly terrors as well as temporal prerogatives, was brought into requisition. In the year 1229, a tenth of the moveables of England was demanded and obtained; and a few years later, a fifth was required from the revenues of the clergy. Another mode of preying upon the kingdom, was that of giving the most valuable of the benefices of England to Italian clerks, the dependents of the court of Rome. The expenditure of ecclesiastical property on this class of foreigners is said to have reached the enormous sum of seventy thousand marks a year —a revenue which exceeded that of the crown by two-thirds. Nor did such wholesale appropriation

of the vacant benefices of England to foreigners satisfy the insatiable avarice of the Papal court. The custom of *provisions*, and that of *commendam*, were also invented to further the same nefarious purposes. By the former, persons were provided for certain livings in anticipation of the next vacancy; by the latter, they were introduced ostensibly to supply a vacancy until a permanent incumbent might be regularly appointed. Under the skillful diplomacy of the court of Rome, such arrangements were commonly rendered equivalent to complete and permanent possession of the places so held. By such measures the intercourse between the Papacy and the English Church assumed the character of the most impious merchandise. The small remnant of Englishmen, who still found a place in the church, attempted to complain of such monstrous abuses; but their complaints afforded only merriment to their oppressors; and when the English prelates attempted to exercise the discipline of the church against the scandalous irregularities of the foreigners, an appeal to Rome sufficed to show the impotence of the English Church, and the irresponsibility of the foreign ecclesiastics who were preying upon it. These abuses were continued without other abatement than such as the impoverished state of the nation made indispensable, till after the accession of Edward III., the times of John de Wicliff.

But it should be distinctly stated, that while the Papal usurpations were thus successfully attempted, it was not done without strong and decided opposition from the different orders of the English people. When the Papal interdict was first resorted to as a weapon of terror against King John, the people disputed the pope's right to employ spiritual weapons in a temporal cause: and when the sentence was announced, the Londoners rang the bells of the city throughout the day, and refused to manifest the signs of contrition usual on such occasions. But the usurpations of the clergy, and the haughty superciliousness of foreign ecclesiastics, were especially odious to the barons. Accordingly we find them, in 1229, indignantly refusing a pecuniary grant which had been solicited by Gregory the Ninth, who then occupied the see of Rome. Subsequently the same spirit led to an organized opposition to the foreign ecclesiastics, which manifested itself both in more stringent legal provisions, and by acts of violence against their persons and estates. Nor were the native clergy generally behind the nobles or the commons in asserting the rights of the English Church. Only one clergyman was found to sign the infamous deed which was designed to render the kingdom of England a fief to the Papacy. An archbishop, also, who had been the principal agent in obtaining the Magna Charta, was the first in the or-

der of nobility to denounce that odious compact as invalid, and a national reproach. By an assembly of prelates and abbots, the first demand on the wealth of the hierarchy, under the third Henry, was successfully resisted. A claim was afterward preferred on a tenth of the movables of the church by Pope Gregory, which was first debated for several days, and then only yielded under a protest against making this grant a precedent for future exactions. In 1238, a fifth of the clerical revenues was demanded to aid the pope in his wars against the emperor. The English prelates thereupon reminded the pontiff of their former protest, called in question the justice of the war in which he was engaged, and complained loudly of the tyrannical threat of excommunication denounced against such of the clergy as should resist this pecuniary demand. The claim was accordingly refused. Thus repulsed by the prelates, the Popish legate next assailed the inferior clergy; but these he found no less inclined to question his claims, and to disparage the cause of his master, than were their superiors. In 1245 a stand, no less vigorous than united, was made by the same class of men, in connection with the nobles and the commons; a measure which was destined to miscarry only through the pusillanimity of the king.

A prominent place in the list of English ecclesi-

astics who opposed the rapacity of the popes is due to the name of Grostete. In the year 1253, while he was bishop of Lincoln, he received a mandate from Rome, requiring him to induct a certain Italian boy to a vacancy in his diocese. The venerable prelate, whose learning and sanctity had won the applause of his countrymen, shrunk with indignation from the odious service. In a letter to the Papal court, after the usual professions of reverence, he declared his purpose to follow its decisions only so far as they should accord with the doctrines of Christ and his apostles. The practice of conferring cures on parties incompetent to the duties of the pastoral office he considered a most perilous heresy, and strongly intimated that by the encouragement given to such malpractices, there was great danger that the seat of St. Peter would become a chair of pestilence, and his holiness himself all one with anti-christ and Satan. Such freedom was far from being acceptable to the pontiff, and probably the temerity of the English prelate would have given him some inconvenience had not the prudence of a part of the cardinals somewhat abated the wrath of his holiness. It was suggested that the reputation of the bishop of Lincoln yielded not to that of any prelate in Christendom; that the evils of which he complained could not be said to be imaginary: and that his complaint was so well supported by facts and reasonings, as to

render any hostile movement against him a matter of doubtful policy. These prudent admonitions at length prevailed. But Grostete became still more the enemy of the corruptions of the Papacy; and had the zeal of his youth but accompanied the better light of his old age, he would probably have been enrolled among the most distinguished benefactors of his country. On his death-bed, it is said, he denounced the pope as a heretic and antichrist; and the popularity of his name gave currency to a tale of his reappearance after death, to charge his crimes upon the guilty pontiff.

On the accession of Edward the First, (1272,) the spirit of the clergy was no less favorable to an abridgment of the Papal influence, especially in respect to their property, and to the ancient discipline of the Church of England. So long as the intercourse of the king with the court of Rome contributed to the protection of their wealth, they were the partisans of the crown; but when the necessities of that crown exposed them to like exactions from another quarter, they attempted to cover themselves under the wings of the Papacy. Edward was the first of the English monarchs who laid important restrictions on the extent of the wealth and authority of the national priesthood. He extended the laws of the realm over the persons and property of the clergy; and though he allowed them a final

appeal to the ecclesiastical authorities, that course was so beset with inconveniences that few chose to avail themselves of it. He framed the celebrated statute of Mortmain, to prevent the undue augmentation of ecclesiastical property—a law which left the then estates of the sacred order undisturbed, but prevented their further increase, by consigning every future donation of such property to secular uses.

In the twenty-fifth year of the reign of that monarch, the comparative strength of the civic and the clerical influence in the nation was effectually tested. The king asked a supply from the resources of the church. The clergy, after mature deliberation, in their several orders, were unanimous in stating that their possessions could not be laid under contribution to the necessities of the sovereign, without the consent of the pope. The conduct of Edward at this crisis was summary and efficient. As Churchmen had declared themselves and their property to be independent of the laws of the realm, the king now declared them to be beyond the protection of his laws. The royal officers judged every cause in which the clergy were defendants, but discarded all in which they were plaintiffs. By this means that favored class was made sensible of their obligation to the authorities whose claims they had so deliberately contemned, and the sovereignty of the civil

powers over the clergy was indirectly, but efficiently, asserted. Matters remained much in this state during the reign of the second Edward, and until the reins of government passed from his hands to the better guidance of his son Edward the Third.

It thus appears that before the age of Wiclf, the ambition and the avarice of the Papal court were seriously resisted not only by the sovereigns and nobility of England, but by the clergy and the people also; and that a continuous effort was made to preserve in the state a power which should preside over that of the church. The spirit of reform, however, was but faintly perceptible until it was exhibited in the character of him whose history will be found in the following pages. Nothing can exceed the revolting descriptions which are repeatedly given by contemporary historians of the court of Rome, and particularly its unprincipled measures in relation to the vassal kingdom of England. Nothing, however, was further from the minds of these writers than to question even the temporal power of the popes. Men indeed were found who abhorred much that was practiced with all the constancy of habits by the popes and cardinals, and the clergy generally, yet these same men would applaud the persecuting zeal which was directed to crush the few who dared to separate from a communion confessedly so impure. This inconsistency was particularly prevalent

in England previous to the appearance of Wicliff. To believe that religious benefits might be obtained in any way, apart from the established sacraments; or that such rites might be efficient, though performed by men despising the consecration presumed to be conferred on the clergy by St. Peter's representatives, demanded a method of inquiry, and a degree of mental intrepidity, which we seek in vain among Englishmen before the latter half of the fourteenth century. Still the notorious viciousness of the clergy must have tended to diminish the respect of the laity for them, and thus prepare the minds of the better informed to receive more wholesome instruction. The dispute between the first Edward and the hierarchy, compared with the similar contest of Henry the Second, exhibits no small decline of this peculiar homage. So weak were the ties, both of fear and attachment, between the shepherds and their flocks, that the clergy were no sooner thrown out of the king's protection, than they found themselves friendless, their persons exposed to every insult, and their property to all manner of depredation. The primate himself fled for safety to an obscure cottage, with a single servant, and mourned in secret over the stern policy, and the altered times, which had so far destroyed the iniquity of sacrilege, and exposed an order, designated as sacred, to vulgar resentment and contempt. As yet, however, the

doctrine of the church, corrupt as it was, had been assailed by very few, and so partial were the assaults upon its discipline, that no one had yet been found of sufficient hardihood to question the exclusive and efficient power of the clergy in communicating spiritual gifts. Some of the continental sects had indeed felt this spiritual bondage, and learned to regard personal piety as essential to ministerial efficiency; but in England such views were quite unknown.

The relation in which that kingdom stood to the persecuted and protesting non-conformists of the continent, during the middle ages, was far from being favorable to their cause. Their doctrinal opinions and religious practices were known only by means of the distorted and grossly lying statements of their enemies. The anathemas of the church had been thundered forth against the Albigenses, in which the whole vocabulary of the dialect of curses peculiar to Rome was exhausted in exhibiting these scattered remnants of the fold of Christ as the proper objects of loathing and destruction. The swords of English crusaders had been made drunk with their slaughter, and the monster who had led on the carnage and butchery in the wars of Languedoc had received the honors of a saint, and miracles were said to have been wrought at his tomb. There was, therefore, but little correct knowledge of these sec-

taries in England, and very few of them ever passed over to that kingdom to give more correct information. A single instance of this kind is on record. In the year 1159 there appeared in England a band of strangers, about thirty in number, and of both sexes. They spoke the language of Germany. Their professed object was secular employment. But their neglect of some religious customs soon attracted attention, and they were committed to prison to await a further inquiry into their religious opinions. On examination their morals were found to be unimpeachable, their faith was acknowledged to be orthodox, and Gerard, their pastor, was confessed to be a man of learning. They were, however, convicted of rejecting baptism and the eucharist, marriage and Catholic communion. It is probable that this rejection consisted only in discarding the natural and necessary efficiency of sacraments, and in denying the sacramental character of marriage, and the necessity of communion with the corrupt Roman antichrist. That their obnoxious opinions were really of this harmless description is not only the construction suggested by charity, but by reason also. To prevent the spread of such dangerous doctrines, the strangers were condemned as heretics, and delivered over to the secular authorities. They were then doomed to be branded in the forehead—to be publicly whipped through the city—and to be cut off

from the smallest charities of social life. To the inflictions of the appointed penalties, they are said to have submitted with cheerful patience; but when the hand of the persecutor was withdrawn, the elements became a still more intolerable scourge upon their lacerated bodies, perishing for want of both food and shelter. It is believed that all of them perished miserably. These, says the monkish historian, with apparent satisfaction in view of the unsullied orthodoxy of his country, were the first heresies known in England since the arrival of the Saxons. Another company of sectaries, who were styled Albigenses, and who are said to have reached that island during the reign of John, seem to have been equally unhappy in their choice of an asylum, for it is coolly observed by Knighton, they were "burned alive." These barbarities were intended to act as warnings to future immigrants, and they appear to have effectually preserved the English people, for three centuries, from all contagious intercourse with the continental sectaries.

Nevertheless, during this long night of gloomy superstition and corruption, extending from the Norman conquest to the time of Wicliff, a few scattered stars arose to shed a mild radiance upon the surrounding darkness of the English Church. Lanfranc, who filled the see of Canterbury under the Conqueror, though the champion of transubstantia-

tion, and the patron of monachism, was evidently deeply penetrated with a sense of the depravity of the human heart, and was, in his own experience, not altogether a stranger to deep devotional feelings. Anselm, his successor, was better instructed in the peculiar doctrines of the gospel; and in his mind they were evidently associated with that feeling of spiritual prostration and confidence which they so powerfully tend to produce when truly embraced. The successors of Anselm, for a century and a half, were strangers to his spirit; and while some were chiefly occupied in state affairs, others were found in the camp of the crusaders, or were liable to the charge, even at that period, of incapacity and negligence. In 1232. Edmund, a prebend of Salisbury, and a dignitary who had acquired the reputation of learning and of unusual piety, was called to the see of Canterbury. The elevation of a person of real piety to a place of such power and distinction, at such a time, could be productive of little else than chagrin and disappointment. He labored in vain to correct some of the prevailing evils of the times; and his death, after an interval of eight years, is attributed to the grief excited by the civil and religious disorders of his country. He was conversant with the writings of St. Augustine, and also with the Scriptures; nor could he have taught, as he has written, without censuring, at least indirectly, the

false doctrines and debasing customs of his day. But though neglected, and perhaps contemned while he was alive, his virtues commanded reverence after his death, and procured his canonization seven years from that event.

From the death of Edward, in 1240, there arose no luminary in the English Church to interrupt the murky gloom of Papal night for more than a hundred years. Of that period it may be said emphatically, “Darkness covered the land, and gross darkness the people.” The spirit of superstition was then lord of the ascendent, and no salubrious breeze from a more healthful clime ruffled the dead sea of spiritual ignorance. In 1349 the seat of Augustine was given to the celebrated Bradwardine. That prelate was born during the reign of the first Edward; was educated at Merton College, Oxford, and was subsequently known as one of its proctors. His life was that of a scholar, and among the most distinguished of English schoolmen is found the name of Bradwardine; nor was it altogether unjustly that he received the appellation of “the Profound.” He was chaplain to Edward Third, by whom he was twice designated for the office of the archbishopric of Canterbury—an honor at first declined, but accepted by him in 1349, only a few weeks before his death. Whether Bradwardine, who had so far excelled as a divine, would have been equally efficient as a

metropolitan, may be doubted; but in the former capacity his proficiency was believed to be unrivaled. In his writings the scholastic taste of the author is sufficiently evident, while the essential doctrines of the gospel are explained and defended with a felicity which has been noticed by the divines of a later period, with equal pleasure and surprise. The object of his principal work is to demonstrate the present depravity of human nature, and its entire dependence on the atonement of Christ and the influences of the Holy Spirit for salvation. In conducting his argument the writer often complains that these Scriptural tenets were rarely announced to his contemporaries, but to be despised. Some he describes as wholly rejecting the influence of the Spirit, while others regarded it as the reward of some self-sustained meritorious services, and he himself, like the prophet Elijah, was left alone to assert the cause of truth and of his God. But as the zeal of Bradwardine was directed toward a reformation of theological doctrines, leaving the evils of polity and discipline untouched, no violent commotions were produced by the publication of his opinions; but it is probable that in his writings were contained the germs of the reformed opinions which were subsequently developed by Wicliff. Among the inferior prelates and the common clergy were also found, from time to time, persons whose moral characters and

doctrinal views were calculated, in some degree, to restrain the outbreaks of licentious wickedness, and to teach the real nature of the Christian faith. Eminent among these was the celebrated “Master of the Sentences,” Peter Lombard, whose writings illustrate the moral condition of man, and the articles of Christian salvation, no less distinctly than those of Bradwardine; and this ingenious collection of ancient authorities in defense of primitive truth was so far appreciated by the clergy, as to call forth a succession of commentators from the year 1170 to the time of Wicliff.

From this view of the character of the pastors, it cannot be otherwise than with the most painful apprehension that we turn to inquire into the character and condition of the common people. In this estimate the peculiar state of society at that period must not be overlooked. The people of the nation consisted, at that time, of two classes widely separated from each other by an impassable gulf, which not only prevented transitions from the one to the other, but also cut off almost entirely all mutual sympathy. The common people were generally churls or villains—the former holding land on condition of performing servile offices of husbandry, the latter being attached to the land as slaves or serfs. These were esteemed as only a single remove from brute beasts, and even their title to the distinction of

humanity and a future existence was sometimes called in question. That they knew not the Scriptures is certain; and the learned divines of those times thought of nothing less than of addressing themselves to the capacities of the vulgar.

The thirteenth century was drawing toward its close, when Archbishop Peckham complained in an assembly of the clergy, that the duty of preaching had been so extensively neglected, as to reduce no small portion of the English people to the state of the “poor and needy, who seek water, and there is none, and whose tongues fail for thirst.” To supply this serious deficiency, the primate submitted to the council a statement of topics which in future should constitute the matter of regular parochial instruction. This summary includes only the most elementary principles of Christian doctrines and duties, indicating a most profound state of popular ignorance upon these subjects. The several topics of popular religious instruction were accompanied by explanations, which, if really needed, imply the state of the inferior clergy to have been that of the lowest barbarism. It was ordered that each clerk should deliver *four* sermons to his parishioners within a year; and to enable him to do so, the themes were so fully explained as to demand from the preacher but little more than the mechanical labor of transcribing and reading. Such were the enlarged pro-

visions made by a zealous, reforming primate: each parish was to have the privilege of hearing a sermon at the end of each quarter; and that was to constitute the only *oral* instruction, in an age when no other means of teaching was provided for the masses. Of the character of these addresses but little need be said; had they been spoken by angels, they would have been insufficient to meet the spiritual wants of their hearers,—that they were of the lowest order of human discourses is painfully evident.

In proportion to the dearth of the preaching of the gospel, was found an over-estimating of the efficacy of sacraments, and the absolute necessity of seeking salvation only within the pale of the church. The tendency of this established doctrine was to induce a greater confidence in the official aid of the priest, than in the state of the heart, or in the character of God. To dispel this delusion formed no part of the duty which engaged the clergy of the middle ages; and this doctrine so warmly commends itself to the degraded populace of all un-evangelized countries, that a few isolated warnings, unless delivered under peculiar circumstances, can produce but feeble and transient effect.

The result of this hasty review of the early ecclesiastical history of England, is the conviction, that there, as elsewhere, the Papal system effected so great a corruption of Christianity, as to render the

traces of its original purity, occasionally manifested, but so many exceptions to the prevailing faith and customs. It is conceded that the hostilities directed against this vast usurpation may not always have originated in Christian motives, nor have been always sustained by Christian feeling, though such was generally the case. It also appears that the means resorted to for the purpose of arresting such movements were generally worthy of the agents and the cause; being chiefly remarkable for their contempt of justice, honor, and humanity. In that kingdom the most serious costs. and the worst disgrace, imposed on the nation by the Papacy, were too long submitted to; and if the horrors of the Albigensian massacres were not reacted in her cities, it was chiefly because there were no subjects for the persecuting fury of Romish inquisitors. For nearly two centuries before the appearance of Wycliff, the crime of heresy had become both the terror and the loathing of the popular mind, so that the darkness of superstition remained entirely unbroken, while commercial enterprise, the advancement of the science of government, and some incipient religious reformations, were illumining some portions of continental Europe. The power of the church had been used to intimidate; and through nearly two centuries its evil purpose seemed to be nearly achieved. The darkest hour of the long night of

superstition's reign gave birth to one who has been most appropriately styled the "Morning Star of the Reformation." Even his appearance may seem as an untimely birth, but it was his mission to cast the leaven of the gospel into the spiritually lifeless mass of the English nation, which ceased not to work till the whole was leavened.

LIFE OF WICLIFFE.

CHAPTER I.—1324—56.

EARLY HISTORY OF WICLIFF.

A FEW miles from the town of Richmond, in the northern district of Yorkshire, is the small village of Wicliff—a place known in the annals of England ever since the Norman Conquest. The origin of the name is not well ascertained, nor is it certainly known whether the principal landed proprietor gave his name to the village, or whether the Wicliff family derived their name from their place of residence; though the latter supposition is most in accordance with the usages of the times.

At the period of the Conquest, family names were almost wholly unknown; nor did they come into general use earlier than the beginning of the fourteenth century. Before that time, individuals were distinguished by epithets descriptive of some property or relation of the designated person. When one's parentage was

somewhat illustrious, the father's name was frequently annexed to that of the son, a custom that has bequeathed to us the large class of surnames which differ from the most commonly used Christian names, only in the additional letter *s*, signifying the possessive case. Thus Richard, son of William, earl of Pembroke, was called Richard William's. Again: persons, when they became known beyond their own vicinity, were often distinguished by the name of their place of residence; and this usage prevailed especially among the members of the universities, who, coming thither from all parts of the kingdom, would naturally be called by the name of the place whence they came. It may have been in this manner that the subject of these pages received a name to which he gave such lustre and notoriety as to make it almost exclusively his own.

Wicliff, however it may have originated, was the name of a family of some consideration, residing in the place of the same name. For more than five hundred years that place is known to have been the residence of the Wicliff family, the heads of which were lords of the manor and patrons of the rectory of Wicliff. In 1606, the proprietor having lost his only son, the estate descended to a daughter,

and so passed from the name. During the life-time of our reformer there were two rectors of Wicliff, who bore the family name; and indeed that family continued to be one of some distinction even after the original name was lost by the marriage, into another family, of the last heir of the house of Wicliff.

Whether the celebrated proto-reformer was of that family may be considered an unsettled question, though it is a very generally received tradition that he was. He would, doubtless, have received the epithet, "de Wicliff," upon his entrance at the university had he been only a native of that place, but not of the family of the lord of the manor. There is no reason to doubt that he was a native of the parish of Wicliff, in Yorkshire, as the name is evidently a local one, and this is the only place of that name in England; nor is there any reason to conclude that he was not of the principal family of that place.

His name, indeed, does not occur in the existing records of that family; but this omission may be easily accounted for by stating that the Wicliff family continued to be active partisans of that superstition which John de Wicliff labored to overthrow. The practice of expunging obnoxious records has been resorted to in

more enlightened times, and in cases where the prospect of consigning the hated truth to oblivion was much less promising than it was in this case; and we know enough of the temper with which the name of the reformer was treated to assure us that such an act as that above supposed would have been perfectly in keeping with the disposition of his enemies. The spirit that would grudge the quiet of the grave to the bones of a dead enemy, would not scruple to use foul means to rid an ancient family, otherwise entirely above the suspicion of heresy, from so dark a plague spot. In the whole of the reformer's writings we find no direct reference to his family and the friends of his youth; though in one of his tracts he indulges in remarks which disclose the state of his feeling at that time, and which may have been suggested, or more forcibly brought to his mind, by what he had himself experienced. In this tract he censures the worldly-mindedness of parents who seek only the temporal aggrandizement of their children, to the entire neglect of their spiritual welfare. Nor is this the worst of the case, for they also hinder them when they are desirous of devoting themselves to piety and Christian meekness; "for by so doing," he continues, "the child getteth many

enemies ; and they say, *that he slandereth all their noble kindred, who were ever held true men and worshipful.*" It is certainly not unreasonable to presume that Wicliff was the victim of this species of petty malice, and that a family, whose name he has embalmed in immortality, and rendered illustrious in all coming time, refused to own him as one of their household. "The sum of our evidence on these points," says one of his biographers, "may be placed within a small compass. The surname of Wicliff is unquestionably of local origin ; and there is no locality in the kingdom from which it could have been derived besides that which is still so designated. The only inference to be adopted, therefore, is, that the connection of the reformer with the village of Wicliff was certainly such as to induce himself, and his contemporaries, to regard it as the place of his nativity. To the tradition, which has further connected him with the family to which the name of that village was particularly applied, there is nothing opposed except the omission of his name in the archives adverted to. But this omission is explained by a reference to the religious prejudices of the age ; and the tradition rendered probable by the fact, that in the numerous Wicliff manuscripts which have

descended to us there is not the least allusion to any such relations, which is not in strict agreement with the supposition that the case described by the reformer, in the preceding extract, was his own."

The year 1324 is the date usually assigned as that of the birth of John de Wicliff, called, in his own times, "the evangelical doctor," and also, since that great religious revolution, "the morning star of the Reformation." There is great unanimity among his biographers as to the year of his birth, though there is an entire want of positive evidence to fix its date. His appearance at Oxford as a student, in the year 1340, renders it highly probable that, in this instance, tradition is not far from the truth. It is reasonable to suppose that a youth, from a remote part of the kingdom, would go up to the university at about the age of sixteen, and, in the absence of all direct evidence, such a probability is sufficient to put the question at rest. Of the early history of Wicliff we have no account whatever—a fact not at all singular, and such as has occurred much more recently relative to men equally renowned. The early history of the celebrated Scots reformer, Knox, is equally obscure, though he lived in less evil times, and two centuries later. The early life

of distinguished men, like the first move toward great revolutions, is often unnoticed by contemporaries, and, consequently, unknown to posterity. It is frequently long after the little common-place affairs of childhood and youth have passed into oblivion that such an interest gathers around the name of the man as to make us wish to view him in every step of his ascent to greatness. In this, as in many other cases, the desire to trace the early dawning of future greatness came too late to be made available.

The first authentic account of Wicliff is that of his admission to Queen's College, Oxford, in 1340. That college was then newly founded, under the patronage of Queen Philippa, wife of Edward III. For causes now unknown, after a short time he removed to Merton College, which was then enjoying the highest reputation of any one in the university, and numbered among its members some of the brightest luminaries of the age. Here the celebrated Bradwardine had lately filled the chair of divinity; and here Occam and Duns Scotus had disclosed that splendor of genius which filled Christendom with their renown.

His education, from the beginning, is supposed to have been conducted with a view of fitting him for the church—a designation which

tradition affirms was early made in his behalf. His preparatory studies would, therefore, be conducted with a reference to that end, though nearly the same preparation was required of all classes of candidates upon their first entrance at the universities. That consisted of little more than the elements of the Latin, then the language of the learned throughout Europe. After entering the university, the student passed to the study of certain approved works on grammar, rhetoric, logic, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. These sciences, seven in number, were thought to be so explained as to include in their mystic circle whatever was deemed important or even possible to be known.

A few years previous to the date of Wicliff's appearance at Oxford, that seminary is said to have contained thirty thousand students; but owing to certain unpropitious affairs, which will presently require our notice, there were then not more than one-fifth of that number. He seems to have entered upon the prescribed round of studies with a good degree of zeal and perseverance. In the received doctrine of natural philosophy he appears to have felt but little interest, and even to have questioned the artificial and arbitrary maxims in which it was

delivered. Rhetoric and logic occupied more of his attention ; and in these sciences, as there taught, he evidently became a proficient, though, on account of the vicious system then in fashion, they were, at best, of doubtful utility. In the Latin language, his attainments were such as were then expected of candidates for the honors of the university. A very imperfect acquaintance with this language was the only attainment in philology then required from candidates for the clerical office. It is manifest that he both spoke and wrote Latin fluently, if the learned jargon of the middle ages may be called by the same name with the classics of the Augustan age.

With these studies, that of the civil and common law, and also of divinity, as taught by the schoolmen, had long been associated. These branches of knowledge were closely pursued by our student ; and with the laws of the empire and of the church as subjects of study, he united those of England as not less deserving his attention.

In conformity to long-established usage, he devoted himself to the study of the scholastic theology, in which he soon became distinguished by both his acquirements and his skill. Such was his diligence that he is said to have com-

mitted to memory many of the more intricate portions of Aristotle; and so great was his success that an implacable enemy described him as “second to none in philosophy, and in scholastic discipline altogether incomparable.” The systems of the Schools were then at the height of their reputation, and every process of reasoning was submitted to their arbitrary rules. It may appear doubtful to one who has quite escaped from their tangled toils, whether instruction in such a system of education is of any real and substantial value. But while it must be confessed that the principal defects and blemishes in Wicliff’s doctrinal writings may be charged to his scholastic education, yet it should not be forgotten that, in his times, the rules of the schoolmen were the acknowledged principles of reasoning among the learned, and that truth itself lost much of its force unless clothed in the livery of that system.

It may also be proper to add, that in the writings of the schoolmen, while there is much that is skeptical in its tendency, and still more that is useless and puerile, the truths of the gospel are not unfrequently to be discovered—and that they are sometimes exhibited there with a degree of correctness, and marked by a purity of application, which would do honor to

writers of a later period. That the mind of Wicliff derived a portion of light from this source is probable; and it is evident that others were thus prepared to receive his more peculiar doctrines. From his writings it is plain that he never wholly abandoned the scholastic topics of discussion, nor its methods of reasoning.

His theological principles, however, were chiefly formed by a diligent perusal of the primitive Christian writers, especially those of Augustine, Jerome, Basil, and Gregory. Among modern divines, he chiefly valued Grostete and Fitzralph. But his studies were most nobly distinguished from those of his contemporaries by his ardent devotion to the sacred volume, by which he gained the appellation of evangelical doctor, and through whose aid he was enabled to make a deep and permanent impression upon his own and all subsequent generations. It is somewhat difficult, in our changed circumstances, properly to estimate the degree of moral courage, and intellectual independence, that was required in one who would presume to break away from the authority of time-honored principles, and take his stand upon the word of God. On the one hand he had to encounter the frowns of the pope, who forbade

all appeals to the Scriptures against his own pretended infallibility; on the other, he must expect the scowls of learned ignorance, which disdained any guide through the mazes of theology but Aristotle, and looked with contempt upon those shallow intellects who resorted directly to the sacred text for instruction in the science of salvation.

It is not indeed surprising that the mind of young Wicliff imbibed the sentiments of the age respecting the value of the scholastic philosophy, but it would have been strange had not such a mind as he evidently possessed, discovered its fallacies, and broken away from its slavery. Though he continued to make use of that method to the last, he used it rather as an instrument subject to the dictates of common sense, than as an authority to which a final appeal could be made; and even thus far it is doubtful whether it could be used to advantage.

About the time that Wicliff had accomplished the years of his minority, Europe was afflicted with a most awful visitation of providential chastisement. In later and more enlightened times, such fearful scourgings would not fail to awaken the most gloomy forebodings, and intensely painful anticipation of the consummation of the

tale of human crimes and sufferings. In the year 1345 a pestilence of unequaled destructiveness appeared in Tartary. Having ravaged various kingdoms of Asia, it lingered for awhile in Egypt,—was wafted thence to the islands of Greece and the shores of the Mediterranean, and after sweeping the states of Italy with indiscriminate ruin, it at length crossed the Alps and penetrated nearly every recess of inhabited Europe. Two years had been occupied in its desolating progress when the continent was convulsed by a succession of earthquakes. From June to September of the same year (1347) England was deluged with incessant rains. In the following August, the plague appeared in that kingdom, and soon filled the land with terror and desolation. It is estimated that in London alone one hundred thousand perished; and the most moderate of those times supposed that the kingdom was swept of one half its population. The infected generally perished in a few hours; and the strongest could not survive its ravages more than two or three days. The distemper passed from men to beasts, and the land was filled with putrid flesh. The labors of husbandry were suspended; the courts of justice closed; the timid resorted to every device of superstition for security, and perished, sometimes buoy-

ant with delusion, and sometimes frenzied by despair. Such a calamity could not have been otherwise than alarming to the most serious and reflecting; and from Wicliff's frequent reference to it, in after life, it is evident, that the things he saw made a permanent impression on his mind.

The pious mind is naturally led in seasons of such fearful visitations to expect that chastisement will not be in vain, and that men will learn to fear the mighty Power that is so signally vindicating his insulted justice. But such reformations are not the usual effects of wasting pestilences. The worst forms of human depravity are often seen among the desolations of wide-spreading disease and death. Then the remorseless selfishness of the human heart displays itself. The physician no longer regards the call of the suffering subjects of disease, or else sports with their hopeless misery; the worldly priest, unmindful of his sacred obligation, and careful only for himself, ceases to seek the bedside of the dying to minister the last consolations of religion; prowling demons in human form follow in the footsteps of death to pillage the depopulated dwellings; even the dearest ties of humanity seem to be dissolved, while husbands and wives desert their dying

companions, and parents and children abandon each other in the hour of their extremity.

Such was generally the state of things while the plague raged in England. While nearly every dwelling in London was a house of mourning, and many were wholly depopulated,—when the parliament had been frequently prorogued on account of the malady,—Edward III. assembled the gayety of his court to witness the institution of the “Order of the Garter.” The excessive ravages among the poorer classes occasioned a want of laborers, and the excess of unsubdued selfishness manifested itself in the most exorbitant demands of wages for every menial service. The more devoted of the clergy, in consequence of their faithful attendance upon the suffering, had been to a great degree swept off by disease, and their places were generally supplied by a set of men grossly incompetent for the duties of any spiritual office ; so that in society the evils ever resulting from a vicious and defective ministry became increasingly evident.

This alarming state of things filled the mind of Wicliff with the most gloomy forebodings. He had seen the hand of the Lord stretched out in chastisements, but the people had been hardened in crime, rather than humbled into

penitence, and now he apprehended a still more fearful display of divine wrath, in the near approach of the final judgment. It is deeply instructive to observe how readily the heart of man turns to that great event, in seasons of unusual excitement, upon subjects relating to God and eternity. Perhaps there has not lived a single generation since the ascension of Christ that has not heard of its probable speedy approach. And while we deplore the fanaticism that has generally marked these seasons of apprehension, disqualifying, in many cases, its subjects for the discharge of their social and even religious obligations, we should deal tenderly with the morbid spirit, and always remember that such a state of mind is generally an aberration of the best principles of the soul. Fanaticism is a fearful spirit to be let loose upon society, and its consequences are often the most deplorable; and yet we have learned to covet its influence, when it becomes the only alternative to the dead sleep of irreligion. The greatest benefactors of our race have not unfrequently been more or less affected by it, and few of the great revolutions, by which the downward course of the church has been arrested, have been wholly free from its influences. Such, indeed, is the mixture of

truth and error in the present world, and such are the benevolent arrangements of Providence, that it would not be easy to select a character of eminence, in which there should be no valuable attainment to be traced to the operation of very imperfect truth, or even, in a very considerable measure, to delusive calculations. When the new creation shall be completed, the light which is now seen to be good will be wholly divided from the darkness; but during the progress of this separation, the errors of men will be so commonly impregnated with their opposites, that both will frequently appear to be laid under the same contributions.

The apprehension of the near approach of the great day of the Lord appears to have greatly influenced Wicliff's devotional feelings, and to have been the occasion of his first publication—a small treatise entitled, “The Last Age of the Church.” It was written in 1356, in the thirty-second year of his age. His meditations upon the late dreadful scourge appear to have been heightened by the study of certain predictions, uttered by a class of enthusiasts during the middle ages, who predicted the destruction of the Church of Rome, and the approach of a purer era. With these seers as his guides, he arrived at the conclusion that the close of the

fourteenth century would be that of the world. He confirmed these predictions by the authority of King David, by that of the venerable Bede, and of St. Bernard. Four great tribulations were to have come upon the church ;—the first took place when the church was assailed by heathen persecutions ; the second, when these were succeeded by the allurements of heresy ; the third, which he conceived to be the present, had arisen from “the secret heresy of simonists ;” and the last, which would terminate about the year 1400, would be “the triumph of antichrist.”

As an attempt to foretell coming events, this was perhaps about as worthless as thousands of others, whether made by the learned or the unlearned, and whether derived from merely human authority or from forced interpretations of obscure portions of the Bible. But still it is a highly valuable tract, since it shows us the mental and religious character of its author, upon his first entrance upon that career which has made all future ages his debtors. It shows us that he was even then a religious man ;—that in the times of calamity he looked to the Lord, and learned wisdom from his judgments. But in his religious awakening his spirit did not

avert to the mummeries of superstition, but he made his confessions to God alone.

Most writers who record the sufferings of that period, attribute them to superficial causes,—especially to the luxury then prevalent in the higher classes of society; but Wicliff traced the evil nearer to its source, and pointed out the corrupt state of the clergy, and the consequent infection of every portion of the community, as the cause of Heaven's chastisements upon Europe. He evidently concluded that the clergy had generally become what the Jewish priests were in the times of our Lord's ministry. He accuses them of having sought their places from worldly motives, rather than for the glory of God and the love of souls; and of having obtained their benefices by favoritism, fraud, and bribery. And the intrusion of such persons into the sacred office, he seems to consider a sufficient cause for the wide-spread wickedness of the people, and the consequent wrath of Heaven.

The opinions and feelings disclosed in this production, though but imperfectly developed, are such as to prepare us to anticipate in Wicliff a devout opponent of the corruptions which it describes with so much solemnity and pathos. It is important to know, that even at this period

of his history the nefarious practices connected with the appointment of the clergy to the care of churches had so far shocked his piety as to dispose him to expect the sudden manifestation of the displeasure of the Almighty. At a later period, this object is well known to have engaged the whole of his energies ; and already the outline of his future character appeared in this crude but spirited production. Though only in the thirty-second year of his age he was already raised so far above the ordinary level as to be unable to acquiesce in many existing customs, though sanctioned by the practice of ages and nations. He had already set out upon that course of spiritual instruction which was destined, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to make him not only wise to salvation himself, but the minister of salvation to unborn generations to the end of time.

CHAPTER II.—1356-66.

CONTROVERSY WITH THE MENDICANTS.

FOR the four years next succeeding the publication of the treatise named in the preceding chapter we hear nothing futher of Wicliff. It is presumed that during all this interval he continued to reside at his college at Oxford, and, being now in the vigor of manhood, to store his mind with those intellectual treasures which he used so effectually in after life, and which in fact he was quickly called to exercise in a contest with a most formidable adversary. It is probable that either before, or during this period, he took the initial collegiate degrees, and was also admitted to orders in the church. It would be interesting to be able to follow him through this part of his history ; but the opportunity to do so is doubtless irrecoverably lost.

In the year 1360 he became engaged in a controversy with the mendicant friars. To engage such an enemy, especially in the circumstances in which they were then found, indicates a degree of courage little short of presumption. And yet the calmness and solemnity with which he addressed himself to the extirpation of their

pestilent abuses, proves that it was not a mere wanton love of victory that prompted him to action ; though the energy and cutting severity of his denunciations show that he considered his enemy both powerful and of a highly pernicious character. To this controversy much of his subsequent decision in the work of reformation is to be attributed. It was conducted against some of the most powerful minds of that generation, and involved principles of the highest importance, and led to results the most momentous in the history of religion that had transpired since the age of the apostles. Irritated by the reasoning of their opponent, the mendicants fled to the protection of the Papacy ; and to that tribunal auxiliaries so devoted would not be likely to appeal in vain. The favor, however, which was thence obtained only more plainly discovered the iniquity of the Papal court, and so the more readily prepared the way, in the mind of the future reformer, for an entire abandonment of the whole mystery of iniquity.

The history of monastic orders forms a painfully interesting chapter in the annals of Christianity. A variety of causes may have contributed to their advancement and popularity, but their original source must be sought for in the

deep principles of the human heart. Man would merit the divine favor by his own works, and therefore is not content to do the things that God has commanded, and then leave his case with him, but, by voluntary humiliations and self-inflicted austerities, seeks a sanctity more elevated than Heaven requires. The mystic theology of the primitive church favored this proud self-righteousness of man. The notion of the essential sinfulness of matter led to a systematical warfare with the body ; as it was thought that the soul could be elevated only at the expense of its material habitation. Hence it came to be accounted the highest virtue to refuse to enjoy the blessings with which Providence has crowned our present condition. To abstain from all delicate food, to abandon the joys of social intercourse, and to live in voluntary poverty, were esteemed the sure modes of arriving at the highest attainable degree of spiritual-mindedness. At first each self-devoted ascetic lived by himself, following such rules of life as seemed best adapted to his purposed aims. Some, whom persecution had driven out from society to live in “caves and dens of the earth,” refused to return to the allurements of the world, when the causes that had expelled them ceased to operate. These

were the *solitaries* and *sarabites* of the first ages of Christianity. Subsequently they were collected into communities, living together in common dwellings, bound by vows to maintain a life of contemplative devotion and self-inflicted severities. This in process of time gave rise to monastic orders, which proved in the sequel a most pernicious curse to the church.

In the early ages of the church, the piety which was scandalized by the vices of many who were numbered with the professors of the gospel, may have frequently been edified by opposite examples of monastic severity. A peculiar veneration was thus elicited for the seclusion of fraternities. But the wealth which had rendered the cathedral a scene of luxury, ambition, or avarice, too soon extended its baneful influence to the convents. Here vice was less exposed to public gaze, but in secret its rankest productions were found to vegetate. Feeble checks were from time to time opposed to this wide-spreading corruption, but the current of depravity overtopped them all; and so scandalous did their vices at length become, that a more thorough reformation became essential to their further toleration. To effect a restoration of public confidence was the design of that new discipline to which the mendicant

orders pledged themselves. The wealth, by which the secular clergy and the votaries of seclusion had become alike corrupted, was solemnly relinquished for dependence on the mere alms of the people; and with an itinerant discharge of clerical duties they were to connect that portion of learning which might enable them to promote the cause of the church in the national seminaries. But the mendicants quickly inherited the indiscretions of their predecessors, and at length contributed much to overthrow a fabric which it had been their ambition to uphold.

In 1221, Gilbert de Fresney, with twelve of his brethren of the order of St. Dominic, appeared in England, and fixed their residence at Oxford. Here they soon acquired a popularity equal to that enjoyed by their brethren on the continent. As preachers, these prosperous fraternities were for awhile patronized by the celebrated Grostete; but a further knowledge of their character led that prudent prelate to change his views concerning them; so that from a patron he became their most strenuous and decided adversary. Their zeal, also, to proselyte the youth in the universities, occasioned at a later period a general feeling of discontent and alarm. At length Richard Fitzralph, who,

in 1333, was made chancellor of Oxford, and in 1347 archbishop of Armagh, appeared as a vigorous opponent of their errors and malpractices. He denied the virtue of their voluntary poverty; censured their inroads upon the province of the more ancient clergy, and affirmed that by their influence the number of students at Oxford had been reduced within his memory from 30,000 to not more than a fifth of that number. These complaints were laid before the pope in 1357. But the death of Fitzralph, three years later, left his proposed reformation unaccomplished. The failure of his efforts, and his decease while engaged in them, were viewed by the mendicants as the complete triumph of their cause, little suspecting that in that very year should arise a more formidable antagonist than any with whom they had hitherto been called to contend.

Fitzralph had published his “Conclusions” against the friars, while prosecuting his suit against them at the Papal court; and with these Wicliff seems to have been well acquainted. None of his extant compositions relative to this controversy can be referred to so early a date as 1360, and indeed his chief work against the friars was among his latest productions. But nearly the whole of his writings are more or

less connected with the points of this controversy, and all together seem to indicate that the discussions of 1360 comprehended nearly the whole of his subsequently published "Objections." Respecting these "new orders" he uniformly expresses the same opinion. He did not deny that God had given them to the church, but insisted if this were so, that it was done as a chastisement, as kings were given to Israel. It was in an unguarded moment that the mendicants attempted to sanction their practices by the examples of Christ and his apostles, who, they said, were poor and subsisted by the alms of the pious. An appeal to the word of God brought the inspired volume from its obscurity, vested with the authority of a final arbiter having jurisdiction over all human authority. Such as were displeased by the obtrusive meddling of the friars were thus directed to the records of the gospel, there to ascertain or confute the authority of their novel practices. It is not improbable that it was by this means, to some good degree, that Wicliff formed that attachment to the authority of the Scriptures, and its necessary concomitant, the right of private judgment, which exerted so wide an influence upon his subsequent course of action. It is probable, indeed, that he was far from anticipi-

pating the full results of his inquiries, when he first entered upon them; but having chosen a guide in which he had the fullest confidence, he did not hesitate to follow even when it led him into new and unexpected truths. The failure of Fitzralph, in his more limited project of reform, left but little room to hope for any improvement from such efforts, and probably suggested to Wicliff the necessity of a more complete exposure of ecclesiastical corruptions, and a more vigorous appeal to the common sense of all classes of the people.

This seems to be the appropriate place to notice Wicliff's treatise entitled "Objections to Friars," for though the existing original manuscript of that treatise bears internal evidence of having been written about 1382, still the substance of it was probably prepared about this time, and used in the controversy then carried on against the friars. This work is divided into fifty heads or chapters, and presents a summary of the arguments usually employed against the mendicants. He first charges them with hindering the progress of the gospel. To prove this charge he declares that it was their custom to praise a contemplative life as preferable to an active one: that they were men of defective morals in performing the office of confes-

sors,* that they were intolerant to all preachers not of their own order, teaching that without a license from the secular authorities no man should be suffered to preach the gospel to the people; and this “though the preacher possess never so much knowledge of God’s law, and power and will to work after that knowledge, and the sovereign be never so depraved in life, ignorant of God’s law, and a foe to the souls of Christian men.” These are among the facts adduced to prove that the mendicants were hostile to the progress of Scriptural religion. They show also that the mind of the reformer in his opposition to these false teachers had embraced enlarged views of Christian privileges, and the “liberty of prophesying.” He also charges them with entering the fold of the church unlawfully, and invading the rights of the more ancient clergy: and, by their endless exactions, diverting the aids of the really necessitous from their appropriate objects. As proofs of their con-

* It appears that they were in the habit, in their wanderings about, of granting absolution to all sorts of persons; so that at the season of administering the communion, individuals who had been denounced by the church, for the worst of crimes, were found coming to the sacrament, having been absolved by the friars—thus completely destroying the last vestige of church discipline.

summate hypocrisy, he adverts to their wiles to induce young children to assume their “rotten habit;” their shameless corruption of the rules established by their respective founders, and their uniting more than the splendors of secular lordship with the gravest profession of the most absolute poverty. Against their practice as beggars several appropriate scriptures are cited, and the names of several of the fathers of the church are adduced as authorities. He also accuses them of contempt for the civil powers, of encouraging simony with a view to a share in its spoils, and of preferring the dispensations of the pope to the commands of the Redeemer. It is more than insinuated that by their influence the secrets of the state frequently became known to its enemies, and the wealth of the kingdom passed into the hands of foreigners. And last of all, he charges them with blasphemy in attributing to the pontiff, in the act of pardon, a power that pertains to God alone, and in vesting the rules of their order with an authority which they denied to the commands of the Saviour.

Such is the nature of Wicliff’s treatise against the begging friars. His attacks were especially distinguished from those of Fitzralph and others, who had contended with these “new orders,” by his expose of their evils as the necessary

consequences of the mendicants' discipline. Instead of supposing that the abuses so commonly condemned were only accidental to the system, and that if these were removed the fraternities would be really useful to the cause of religion, he strongly contended that nothing short of their entire extirpation could restore the church to its long lost order and prosperity. But while engaged in so hot a controversy, he seems still to have maintained a spirit of moderation and kindness toward the persons of his adversaries, for while he strongly contended that men should destroy their errors, he seems equally solicitous that they should save their persons, and labor chiefly to bring them to that living which Christ ordained for priests. Though religious controversy has often been so conducted as to appear to aim rather at the defeat and disgrace of an adversary than the establishment of any valuable truth, (a vice especially prevalent in the middle ages,) yet such was not the case with Wicliff. He refers principally to facts to substantiate his charges, and as these facts were for the most part well known, there can be little doubt of the force and fairness of his reasoning.

In order properly to estimate the character of the contest in which our reformer was en-

gaged, we must recollect the character and condition of those against whose cherished systems he declared a war of extermination. For nearly two hundred years the Inquisition had performed its work of torture and destruction on the continent, during most of which time its odious business had devolved chiefly on the members of the orders of St. Dominic and St. Francis, and these were, at the same time, to a very great extent, the confessors, the preachers, and the spiritual rulers of all men. The general ferocity of the times was greatly aggravated among the friars by frequently snuffing the blood of their victims. Their spiritual thunders were so commonly followed by the torture and rack that these tigers, in human form, had become altogether impatient of contradiction, and quite averse to being reproved. Wicliiff himself declares of them, that “a lord would more patiently bear a severe censuring of his least offense, than the mendicants the soft and mild reproving of their greatest sins.” Yet these, with all their wealth, honors, combined strength, and vindictive fury, he dared to engage, having no other support than the goodness of his cause, and the consciousness of doing right. His labors against the friars appear to have been not unacceptable to the universities : for in the next year (1361)

he was presented by the society of Balliol College with the church of Fillingham, a living of considerable value, in the diocese of Lincoln; and about the same time he was called to the dignity of warden in the same college. The former of these he held till 1368, when he exchanged it for Lutger shall, in the archdeanery of Bucks, a living of less value, but nearer to Oxford; and the latter he retained till 1365, when called by Simon de Islip, then archbishop of Canterbury, to preside over the newly founded college of Canterbury Hall, instead of Wodhall, a monk who had embroiled his college, and was in consequence dismissed from his place. This last appointment proved the occasion of much contention, and was made the means of giving Wicliff a fuller insight into the iniquitous practices of the combined legions of the Papacy and the monastic orders. Archbishop Islip died soon after that appointment was given to Wicliff, and was succeeded by Peter Langham, a monk, formerly abbot of Westminster. Langham readily listened to Wodhall's appeal against the late archbishop's decision, and presently annulled the appointment of Wicliff, and restored his monkish predecessor.

It is quite impossible, at our distance of time from these transactions, to decide positively on

which side lay the legality of claim in this case; it is evident, however, that Wicliff had full confidence in the goodness of his cause, otherwise he would not have appealed to the Papal court, from which he had but little reason to expect special favors. He was aware of the encouragement that the religious orders had received from that court, but being supported by the will of the dead, and by what he esteemed obvious justice, he presumed that it might be deemed impolitic to set aside his claims. As yet he knew but little of Papal corruption, and probably his own mind was not yet fully emancipated from a superstitious reverence for the authority of the bishop of Rome. It is also no mean proof of the justice of Wicliff's claim, that it was held in suspense at Rome for three years, and then decided against him. By the act of Langham, the monk was restored to the headship of Canterbury Hall, so that during the delay of the pope's decision, he would still occupy his place, and a decision whose manifest injustice would render its promulgation inexpedient, might at length become involved with other issues, or perverted in appearance by lapse of time, till it should become safe to deny the claim of injured right. The whole affair afforded a new and highly valuable lesson to the struggling

mind of the reformer ; a new view was obtained of the inherent viciousness of the Roman see, and the entire system of Roman Catholicism. Thus another point was gained in the progress of the emancipation of a mind, which, when itself should become free, was destined by Providence to shake the foundations of the throne of antichrist.

About this time the English nation became involved in a controversy with the Papacy of a nature altogether secular. In 1213, King John, the most inglorious of English monarchs, had resigned his throne and kingdom to the pope, and received it back again, to be held in fee from him, for which he stipulated to pay an annual tribute of a thousand marks. This degradation of the kingdom by the prince occurred but two years before his death ; it was, however, renewed by his son. Succeeding monarchs carefully evaded the degrading formality, and the tribute was but irregularly paid ; the court of Rome prudently refraining from pressing an odious claim, when the spirit of the nation had so far recovered as to be likely to dispute it. Thirty-three years had passed since the last annual tribute had been paid, when (in 1365) the arrears for that interval were demanded by the pope. In the following year Edward submitted

this demand to the parliament. The long and prosperous reign of that prince had infused a new spirit into the English people, and rendered them a far different set of men from those upon whose necks the iron heel of the Papacy had long pressed without resistance. The parliament answered, that neither King John nor any other sovereign had power thus to subject the realm of England without consent of parliament; that this consent was not obtained, and that the whole transaction was in violation of the king's coronation oath. At the same time, the strength of the nation was pledged to the king in case the pope should attempt to enforce his claim.

This act of the English parliament was a wide step toward the emancipation of the civil, from its slavery to the ecclesiastical, power, which had been endured for many generations; and it indicates the dawning of a brighter day in that kingdom. It was an open act of rebellion against the power set up by the Papacy, and as such, was denounced by the minions of that all-grasping court. Of this changing state of public sentiment, Wicliff was probably both a subject and a cause. He had imbibed the spirit of independence then beginning to prevail in England, and such principles finding in his

bosom a congenial soil, had quickly sprung up, and were now scattering their seeds on all about them. That he was looked upon by the hierarchy as being intimately connected with the recent acts of parliament, is made evident by the fact that a monk who at this time wrote a treatise in defense of the Papal claims, challenged Wicliff, by name, to meet and answer his arguments.

In his reply he styles himself the king's "peculiar clerk," from which it is presumed that he had received the honorary distinction of royal chaplain. The right of the king and parliament, not only to deny the tribute claimed by the pope, but also to subject the clergy to the civil authority in all civil cases, and even to alienate the goods of the church, is affirmed to be agreeable to law and the ancient practice of the realm. Appealing to these sources of authority, he puts his arguments into the mouths of certain secular lords, to whose debates he feigned to have listened. It is probable that this mode of stating his arguments was adopted as less offensive, seeming rather to state arguments that might be adduced, than to assert them as his own. The positions assumed by these fictitious lords are equivalent to a full assertion of the political independence of the English people of the pope of Rome. and of the

right of the civil authority to control the secular affairs of the church. They contain a manly protest against the greedy exactions of the Papacy, and expose to the execration of indignant freemen its shameless trafficking in the ghostly trade of pardons and absolutions, when a kingdom was demanded in return. But the last speaker, as though warmed by what he had heard, comes out a thorough-going Protestant, asserting that “Christ is the supreme Lord, while the pope is a man, and liable to sin, and while in mortal sin, according to divines, is unfitted for dominion;” he further concludes, “it is, therefore, plainly enough for us to keep ourselves from mortal sin, to the service of one lord of the kingdom—to communicate our goods virtuously to the poor, and, as in former times, to hold our kingdom immediately of Christ, who as chief lord teaches whatever is most lawful and perfect, with respect to man’s authority.”

This treatise is chiefly valuable as showing what were Wicliff’s views upon the questions then discussed relative to the affairs of the church in the kingdom of England. He was evidently far in advance of all his cotemporaries in respect to the adoption of opinions now very generally entertained. A Romish historian*

* Lingard.

says of this paper, that it "is chiefly remarkable for containing the germ of those doctrines which afterward involved Wicliff in so much trouble," and it must be acknowledged that many of his characteristic notions are here presented with a good degree of clearness. For this cause we incline to believe that the debate of the lords introduced by Wicliff was altogether fictitious, as evidently the English nobility had not yet made such advancement toward correct views of civil and religious liberty as is there indicated.

The controversy between the universities and the mendicants had now reached a crisis, and the contest was brought before the parliament. The complaints of both parties were heard, when it was decreed, that no scholar under eighteen should be received into any of the fraternities; —that nothing prejudicial to the universities should be received from the pope, and that all future differences should be decided in the courts of the king, without further appeal.

There is good reason to suspect that the conduct of this cause was in part intrusted to Wicliff. His name had become connected with the present controversy, more intimately than that of any other individual, and the evils which were then sought to be removed by legal provisions,

were those against which his loudest complaints had been uttered. There is abundant evidence that the person of Wicliff, then warden of Canterbury Hall, was not unknown at the parliament of 1366,—an assembly over which the doctrines of which he afterward became so prominent an advocate exerted a powerful influence. The interference of the Papal court in temporal matters was there censured with a peculiar freedom; while the boldest comparisons were sometimes ventured between the present pastors and those of the primitive church. The decisions of the great council of the nation, relative to both the pope's census and the mendicants, were precisely those that were afterward condemned as having either originated with him, or been advanced by his efforts. The entire subjection of the property of the realm, and of all classes of persons, in their civil capacity, to the authority of the magistrate, were tenets which he fearlessly proclaimed and earnestly maintained. He also taught a comparative disregard of the canon law, as being superseded by the Christian Scriptures, which are spoken of as sufficient alone to determine every point of moral or religious obligation. The pontiff also, compared with Christ the invisible Head of the church, is described not

only as a mere man, and as peccable, but as liable to the guilt of mortal transgression ; and considered in mortal sin, he is declared to have forfeited all right to ecclesiastical dominion. The reader will not need to be informed that such opinions would give offense to many, and that by still more they would be questioned as new and dangerous. It is certain that in England the doctrine thus affirmed respecting the sufficiency of the Scriptures, and relative to the alledged consequences of mortal sin, found in Wicliff their first advocate. A few years after the time now considered, a greater prominence was given to this last sentiment, and great practical results derived from it, of which due notice will be taken in a subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER III.—1366–72.

AFFAIRS OF EUROPE—WICLIFF AT OXFORD.

IT was about the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Edward III. that Wicliff became known at the court of that prince by his first defense of the crown. Edward had inherited with his crown a mass of difficulties in the affairs of his kingdom of the most distressing character; but he soon discovered that capacity for government which the distracted state of the kingdom demanded, and which subsequently raised it to an unprecedented height of renown. Among the appendages of the crown, as received from his father, Edward inherited a war with Scotland for the sovereignty of that kingdom; but since the battle of Bannockburn that claim had been only an empty pretence. To that cause of embarrassment was now added a claim to the crown of France, set up by Edward in the right of his mother, the sister of the late king, who had died without an heir. These two wars for two additional kingdoms gave full exercise to the warlike propensities of the English. For nearly twenty years the achievements of their martial spirit resulted in little besides mortification and embarrassment. But the year 1346 was

signalized by the battle of Cressey, which resulted in a victory on the part of the English, and brought great glory, especially to the young prince of Wales, the celebrated Black Prince. A victory which the skill of a few commanders, and the space of a single hour, appear to have determined, imparted a character to the political feelings and relations of Christendom, which long continued to be felt. Edward's ill-supported claim to the crown of France had awakened the indignation of that powerful kingdom, and the disasters of his earlier campaigns had wounded the pride of himself and his followers. By the subsequent victories, in which the chivalry of France was placed entirely at the feet of that of England, the national animosities were imbibited and matured. Ten years after the battle of Cressey, the victory of Poictiers again exasperated the pride of the enemy. The king of Scotland was already a prisoner in the Tower of London, and the sovereign of France was now placed at the head of the many illustrious captives found in the train of the English monarch. The martial vanity of the nation was thus raised to the highest pitch of excitement, and all thought of political repose was for many years entirely laid aside.

Humanity must lament such wide-spread

national enmities, and the consequent disorders and sufferings which prevailed throughout many of the fairest provinces of France ; but by the overruling goodness of Him who compels the wrath of man to praise him, lasting good was thus derived to the inhabitants of England. Edward's wars made it necessary for him to avail himself of all that the nation could afford ; so that his frequent appeals to parliament for supplies, gave an importance to that body hitherto unknown ; and the co-operation, without national distinction, of the Saxon and Norman portions of the population, tended to consolidate the several classes of the people. These results indeed were not contemplated by those who projected and prosecuted these wars ; but though only incidental, they contributed in no small degree to the national improvement.

During the reign of Edward III. the popes resided at Avignon in France, where they were almost wholly subject to the will of the French monarchs. Most of the cardinals who formed the courts of the pontiffs were Frenchmen, and for three quarters of a century, while the Papal seat was in France, there was an unbroken succession of French popes. The vacancies in the English Church were frequently filled by foreigners, and often by the more dignified ec-

clesiastics of the rival kingdom. The treasures of England were thus manifestly transferred into the hands of her enemies, and the French court found in the ecclesiastics of the former country, especially the monks, spies to report the secret designs of their enemies. These facts will, in some measure, explain the origin of the invectives so often employed by the English parliament during this period, when exposing the avarice and encroachments of the Papacy ; and if Wicliff is justly revered as the parent of the English Reformation, these circumstances were certainly most important auxiliaries to that cause.

But Edward never concerned himself much with the pursuits of literature, and still less with speculations about religion. During the former half of his reign he was not in circumstances to risk the serious displeasure of the pontiffs ; and when peace found him the first monarch in Europe, he had attained an age at which few persons embrace new sentiments either in religion or politics. Still he had ventured to vindicate the rights of the nation to a much greater extent than any of his predecessors had done ; for he not only refused to render the demanded price of fealty, but also to continue the more ancient and less offensive tribute of Peter's pence. Nor

is it presuming too much to suppose that in all these things Wicliff was his counselor. The king had made him one of his chaplains, and when an embassy was sent to negotiate with the delegates of the pontiff, respecting certain ecclesiastical affairs in England, Wicliff was among those who received the royal commission. It may be presumed that Edward proceeded quite as far in the cause of the Reformation as could be justly anticipated ; considering the peculiarities of his character, the varying circumstances of his reign, his advanced age at the time of Wicliff's appearance, and the wide and hitherto almost uninterrupted influence of the ancient superstition.

In the Black Prince the virtues of knighthood, which are mostly doubtful, and its defects, which are sufficiently obvious, were all exhibited. It was not from a mind cast in such a mold, nor from its very passionate admirers, that any powerful aid was to be expected in so grave a matter as the restoration of primitive Christianity. Yet even in that court, and in all parts of the kingdom, there were those who applied themselves to the science of government, and who from various motives—of interest, of patriotism, or of religion—were prepared to question the prevailing policy of the church.

Among that class, a conspicuous place must

be assigned to John of Gaunt, (or Ghent,) duke of Lancaster, the only one of Edward's sons whose name is connected with the religion of that period, and who is known as the patron of Chaucer and of Wicliff. He was born at Ghent, in the year 1340, sixteen years after the birth of the reformer. He was first made earl of Richmond, and at the age of twenty-two succeeded to the title and estates of his deceased father-in-law, Henry, duke of Lancaster ; which rendered him the richest subject in the kingdom. An intercourse with Chaucer, which appears to have commenced in early life, inspired him with a taste for literature ; but the restless spirit of the times hurried him away in search of the laurels of knighthood, both in Scotland and in France. His genius and his courage are not disputed; but no splendid achievements like those of his senior brother marked his career. This circumstance was probably advantageous to himself and to his country. Had he acquired celebrity in arms, he would probably have become wholly devoted to the occupations of the soldier, and those serious questions of domestic policy, both in church and state, to which his talents and his influence were so effectually applied, would have been wholly neglected.

It would be gratifying to know the precise

period at which the favor of John of Gaunt was first bestowed upon Wicliff, and to learn the circumstances which led to so important a connection. This however is among the many points in the reformer's history over which time has thrown an impenetrable veil. His attendance on the parliament of 1366, and his subsequent possession of the title of royal chaplain, render it probable that he had become known to his distinguished patron even before the publication of his opinion on the question of the pope's census. It has indeed been thought by some, that one of Wicliff's treatises, which is dedicated to that nobleman, was among his earlier productions; but there is internal evidence that fixes the date of that work at a period near the death of its author.*

It is not till the meeting of the parliament of 1371 that we become again aware of his influence, in connection with any public event. In that assembly a measure was attempted, altogether new in English legislation, and one which

* A volume of Wicliff's manuscripts is preserved in the library of Trinity College, Dublin; to which a notice is prefixed, it is thought by Archbishop Usher, purporting that that volume was dedicated to Lancaster as early as 1368; but nearly all the pieces in that volume contain allusions to facts which prove them to belong to a much later period.

could scarcely have been contemplated, except under a decline of that superstitious homage which had been so long rendered to the clergy. This was nothing less than a proposition to exclude all clerks from the civil offices of the kingdom, on account of the impropriety of allowing men avowedly devoted to the spiritual welfare of the nation to become absorbed in the management of affairs altogether secular. These matters, it was urged, belonged to secular men, who, it was contended, were equal to their own duties. The effort to produce this important change in the government is attributed to the secret influence of John of Gaunt. In the writings of Wicliff, also, no evil is more frequently or more feelingly deplored than that which this measure was designed to remove. From the time of the conversion of the Western nations of Europe, the clergy had held many of the most important offices in the state. England at this time was so far governed by churchmen, that its civil affairs were scarcely less under the control of the prelates than those of the church. Not only were the high offices of lord chancellor, lord treasurer, keeper of the privy seal, and others of like grade, held by churchmen, but also many others, still more exclusively secular and requiring only ordinary capacity in business.

Wicliff saw these practices confirmed by the example of men whose names were honored in their generation; but nevertheless to eradicate the evil was an object to which he applied his most powerful reasoning, and some of his severest rebukes. It had awakened his attention as early as 1356, and in his latest compositions the pernicious custom is assailed with an ardor rather augmented than diminished. To detect this insidious evil, as was done by Wicliff, required much Christian discernment, and unusual independence of thought. And to avow his doctrine on this point, opposed as it was to prevailing and deep-rooted custom, and, above all, to the secular spirit of the existing priesthood, required that the intrepidity of the reformer should keep pace with his intelligence. It is the common lot of reformers to be charged with impiety, and a sacrilegious contempt of the institutions of religion, since in the minds of most persons there is a confusion of the appendages of religion with religion itself. To oppose ecclesiastical abuses, though such a work is essential to the well-being of the church, is therefore a thankless duty, and one, the performance of which naturally brings odium upon him who engages in it. Yet such is the fearful effect of such abuses on men's spiritual interests, that the

heart that feels in any adequate degree the importance of the salvation of mankind is incapable of contemplating them without strong emotions of dislike.

If these things are kept in mind, there will not be any occasion for surprise at the seeming severity of the reformer's language when exposing the vices of the clergy. He considered them as exclusively devoted by their calling to the religious instruction and spiritual care of the people: when, therefore, he saw the shepherd forsaking his flock to pursue secular dignity and worldly gain; when he witnessed such culpable unfaithfulness to the most sacred trusts, he could not but denounce them as highly iniquitous. Among his earlier pieces is one entitled, a "Short Rule of Life," in which, among other things, he delineated the duties of the ministers of religion. He exhorts them to a diligent and faithful discharge of their spiritual functions; to a holy and unblamable life, that their example may give efficacy to their precepts; and to frugality, moderation, and alms-giving, as best becoming their sacred character. To a mind entertaining such views, the removal of the clergy from all secular offices, whether in the household or the cabinet of the monarch, would be deemed a measure intimately connected with the reputa-

tion of the ministry and the best interests of religion. "No man that warreth, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may serve him that hath called him to be a soldier," was a declaration often cited by Wicliff to show that Christian pastors should avoid worldly entanglements. His zeal in advocating these doctrines, and exposing the opposite abuses, afterward exposed him to many serious inconveniences from the persecuting spirit of the English prelacy and the Papal court.

Still his attacks upon the clergy were not indiscriminate; nor did he in any wise teach men to despise their spiritual instructors. In a piece composed about this time, he holds the following language relative to the obligations to render filial obedience to spiritual guides and instructors:—"The second [father] is the spiritual father, who has special care of thy soul; and thus shalt thou reverence him: thou shalt love him especially before other men, and obey his teaching as far as he teach God's will. And thou shalt help, according to thy power, that he have a reasonable sustenance, when he doth well his office. And if he fail in his office, by giving evil example, and in ceasing from teaching God's law, thou art bound to have great sorrow on that account,

and to tell, meekly and charitably, his fault to him, between thee and him alone." If he ever adopted or sanctioned a less gentle method of reform, it was, doubtless, because the state of the malady seemed to require a more severe mode of treatment.

The power of John of Gaunt, at this time, and his known dislike to the obtrusive ambition of the higher clergy, render it highly probable that the proposed change as to the disposition of the offices of the kingdom met with his approbation; and it may also, with certainty, be attributed, in some degree, to the influence of a man whose genius and acquirements were, in the duke's estimation, unrivaled. But as the petition was introduced while Lancaster was absent from the kingdom, and as it was passed unanimously, it is evident that the sentiments of the duke and the reformer were then very generally acceptable to the nation. The petitioners plainly indicate the offices hitherto held by clergymen, which they would have them vacate at once, and never again resume. The language of Wicliff, and that of the parliament, have so many features in common, as to force upon the reader the conviction that they had a common paternity. The nation seems, at this time, to have been rapidly verging to a revolu-

tion in ecclesiastical affairs, which promised to anticipate, by two centuries, the restoration of religious liberty and evangelical piety. But the affairs of Providence were not yet ripe for such an event, and England was doomed again to feel the galling burden of the yoke of antichrist.

On receiving this petition, the king replied that he would act respecting it with the advice of his council. The next month, the bishop of Winchester resigned the office of chancellor, and the bishop of Exeter that of treasurer, and thus prudently retired from the gathering storm. The partial success of this bold measure of reform was well known to be agreeable to the mind of Wicliff, and necessarily exposed him to the resentment of his own order. Nor was their ill-will a trifling evil with which to contend, for if the whole mass of the laity considered the clergy as dangerous rivals in the affairs of state, their power over a recreant brother must have been truly formidable.

About this time Wicliff's dispute respecting the wardenship of Canterbury Hall was brought under the notice of the king. It had been submitted to the pope in 1367, and, after three years, decided against Wicliff; but so palpable appears to have been the iniquity of the decision that the monks feared to trust to it unless they

could obtain for it also the royal sanction. Edward was now sinking under the infirmities of age, and still more under the embarrassments in which his pretensions to the crown of France had involved himself and the nation. His ignorance of religious truth made him a fit subject for the ghostly impostures of the priests, especially as the gloomy forebodings of death inclined him to superstitious devices for the peace of his soul. His need of money, too, rendered the offer of two hundred marks, made by the monks for the royal confirmation, a most potent argument against the reformer. Accordingly, the Papal decision was confirmed, (1372.) and Canterbury Hall given up to the exclusive control of the monks. It may be supposed that the recollection of this affair gave edge to his invectives when directed against similar abuses, though he nowhere alludes to this act of injustice done to himself. It is probable that he had, for a long time, anticipated this issue of the contest, and therefore felt but little chagrin and no disappointment when it occurred.

In the year 1371 Wicliff performed his novitiate for the degree of doctor of divinity, an honor to which he was admitted the next year. In the fourteenth century that dignity was less frequently conferred by the universities than

has become fashionable in later times; and then the title was always intended to be an index to the profound erudition of the individual bearing it. He was, at the same time, raised to the important post of divinity lecturer at Oxford. His elevation to the chair of theology, in the leading university in the kingdom, opened an important field for the propagation of his opinions. He had, at this time, attained the age of intellectual manhood, and he at once brought all the energies of his richly furnished mind into vigorous action. From that chair many of his scholastic pieces, still extant, were doubtless read, which, however much they may have increased his reputation, and thus facilitated the progress of his opinions, are now of very little value. A more valuable work was produced by him about this time—an exposition of the decalogue—written in a plain and popular style, but little disfigured with scholastic subtleties, and well adapted to the instruction of plain, unsophisticated minds.

The summary of duties presented in the ten commandments has formed an important part of the instructions of the church in every age. During a long interval, however, the real import of the moral law was but very imperfectly understood; and, at the same time, the ma-

achinery of the established superstitions was artfully adjusted to deprive the law of nearly all its power, by disclosing innumerable means of escape from its penalties. Great ignorance of the letter of the commandments must have then prevailed, for our author remarks, in the prologue to the work last mentioned, that it was then no rare thing for men “to call God master forty, threescore, or fourscore years, and yet to be ignorant of his ten commandments.” In such an age, no greater service could be rendered to the church than to lay the divine law, in all its purity and sovereign authority, before the people. It could not have failed to awaken interest, and even to cause dismay, to hear from the first doctor of theology in the kingdom such words as these : “ Covet not thy neighbor’s goods, despise him not, slander him not, deceive him not, scorn him not, belie him not, backbite him not—the which is a common custom nowadays ; and so in all other things do no otherwise than thou wouldest reasonably that he do to thee. But many think if they give a penny to a pardoner, they shall be forgiven the breaking of all the commandments of God, and therefore they take no heed how they keep them. *But I say to thee for certain,* though thou have priests and friars to sing for

thee, and though thou each day have many masses, and found chauntries and colleges, and go on pilgrimages all thy life, and give all thy goods to pardoners, *all this shall not bring thy soul to heaven.* While, if the commandments of God are revered to the end, though neither penny nor half-penny be possessed, there shall be everlasting pardons in heaven."

In his exposition of the first commandment, sensuality, covetousness, and pride are particularly noticed, as opposed to the homage and the love so justly demanded by the Creator. The supreme authority of the almighty Father is forcibly set forth, and the love of Christ strongly insisted upon, as motives to constrain us to obedience and spiritual purity. Upon the third commandment he remarks, that "all who would be called Christians, while they live contrary to the living and teaching of Christ and his apostles, take God's name in vain; for it is in vain that a man say he is a Christian man, and do nothing of the works of Christ. Perjury and profane swearing are loudly censured as violations of this precept. His replies to certain excuses, which were urged to extenuate this vice, present a fair specimen of his more popular style of reasoning. Thus, the pretext, that it is proper to have God al-

ways in mind, and so better to use his name somewhat irreverently, than wholly to neglect it, he compares to the conduct of a subject, who should account it a virtue to repeat the name “of a just prince, though it might be to betray him, or to teach others to despise him.” When the practice is extenuated as the effect of habit, the plea is coupled with that of a thief, who should appeal to his confirmed love of depredation as an extenuation of some particular offense. The assertion, that to swear was necessary in order to be believed, is disposed of with equal facility; and here it is especially regretted, that at a period when almost every sentence uttered by men was an oath, this impiety remained unchecked even among the servants and retainers of the bishops themselves. “Certainly,” he exclaims, “it is a wonder, apart from the mercy of God, that the earth openeth not, and swalloweth them quick into hell, for this treason and others besides.” In the same tone and temper he proceeds to expound the other precepts of the law, and to enforce a lowly, Christian obedience to all God’s commandments, pointing out, and strongly condemning, the many flagrant immoralities then commonly practiced, and almost wholly un-reproved.

From this treatise a competent judgment may be formed of Wicliff's opinions in theology, when he commenced his divinity lectures at Oxford. The doctrines which have been generally regarded as the distinguishing truths of revelation were evidently the favorite portions of his creed. He zealously inculcated the lessons of inspiration, on the fall of man, and the consequent depravity of human nature—on the excellences and perpetual obligation of the moral law—on the exclusive dependence of every child of Adam for the remission of his sins on the atonement of Christ, and for victory over temptation, and the possession of holiness, on the aids of divine grace. Nor are these momentous truths regarded with the coldness of mere speculation; but they seem, in his experience, to be associated with feelings of gratitude and humility, with that lowly and hallowed confidence in God, and with those refined pleasures of devotion, which they so directly tend to produce. It should be remarked, also, that the doctrine announced by Wicliff, that the divine favor pertained, certainly, to the worshipers whose reliance on the grace of the Redeemer had produced the love of God and his commandments, *and to such alone*, was one of no small importance. An independence of

priestly mysteries, to which he was now rapidly approaching, proved in him, as it has in many others, the principal and most efficacious means of religious emancipation.

Still the mind of Wicliff was not fully delivered from Romish superstition, for in this same treatise he sanctions a practice which has, to a great extent, reduced the nominal Christian church to a body of gross idolaters. In his notes upon the commandment which forbids the making and worshiping of images, he remarks,—“All such similitudes or images should be as calendars to ignorant folks, and as clerks say in their books what they should do, so ignorant folks, when they lack teaching, should learn by images whom they should worship and follow in living. Each man is forbidden to do God’s worship to images; but it is good to each man to learn by the sight of them to follow saints’ living.” These specious arguments in favor of a positively forbidden practice are the same that the Church of Rome is accustomed to use on all occasions. She indeed pretends that “God’s worship” must not be offered to the image; but “ignorant folks” cannot clearly distinguish that worship from what they are taught to offer to the image or picture. Although we may presume that Wic-

liff did not favor any idolatrous reverence for images, it is evident that he was not yet fully awake to the danger of using them, even as "helps to devotion." It is also thought by some, that he still held the notion of a purgatory, and of redemption after death. Some remarks in the tract above referred to seem to favor that opinion, though they do not necessarily imply a belief of the Romish notions upon these points. When he speaks of Christ redeeming us from *hell*, he may mean no more than that we are by his death delivered from that state of condemnation, of which hell is the final award; and when he names *purgatory*, he may mean the place of departed spirits, not as undergoing purgatorial pains, but awaiting, in incipient bliss or misery, according to the character of each, the final decisions of the day of judgment—a sentiment entertained by many genuine Protestants. It is, however, most probable that, at this time, his mind was in a state of transition from the vain dogmas of the church and the schools to the pure doctrines of the inspired word; nor is it wonderful that, after he had embraced the vital truths of Christianity, some of his long-cherished errors still lingered in his mind.

CHAPTER IV.—1372-77.

EMBASSY TO THE POPE—PROMOTIONS—PERSECUTIONS.

In the introductory portion of this work, notice was taken of the frequent disputes between the earlier Anglo-Norman kings of England and the Romish prelates. The object of this struggle was to determine the respective bounds of the civil and ecclesiastical powers among the English people. The homage which the proud pontiffs demanded of princes, though spurned by the earlier successors of the Norman conqueror, was, after more than a hundred years, wrung from the weakness of King John. From that period the popes often asserted their will to be above all law, whether in matters of church or state, while their numerous exactions show that their rapacity was little impeded by sentiments of either justice or pity. Against this system of tyranny and depredation occasional remonstrances were offered; but with so little effect, that upon the accession of Edward III. the nation had become, in a great degree, impoverished by long-continued rapine.

In the sixteenth year of the reign of that monarch, the ruling pontiff declared the next

two vacancies in the English Church, amounting to the annual value of two thousand marks, to be granted by provision to two of his cardinals. The moment was unfavorable for such a demand, and the language of complaint which had been uttered by the nobles and commons under preceding sovereigns was now repeated, and found a favorable reception with the king. In his letter to the pope, Edward complains of the bad effects of the custom of *provisors* in diverting the property, designed for the support of religion, to men who were alike unable and unwilling to discharge the duties of their offices; and also in impairing the jurisdictions of his courts, and as being at variance alike with the royal prerogative, and the right of chapters and patrons. These evils are declared to be insufferable, and therefore it is required that the practice which had given rise to them should be instantly abolished.

But the redress of these grievances, though thus firmly demanded, was asked in vain; and therefore, in 1350, the king and parliament set about the protection of the kingdom by statutes. A law was then passed, commonly called the "statute of provisors," by which it was decreed that any clerical appointment, if opposed to the rights of the king, the chapter or the patron,

should be void ; and that the parties offending by making such appointment should be subject to fine and imprisonment, without appeal beyond the king's court. Three years later another was passed, known as the "statute of pre-munire," forbidding all appeals from the decisions of king's courts to the rehearing of the plaintiffs, and exposing all who should so offend in future to heavy fines and imprisonment, at the king's will. These laws had a salutary effect upon the kingdom, though they were in many instances evaded.

In 1373 the parliament still complained of the evils arising from Papal provisions, and a royal embassy was accordingly sent to the pope, to inform him of the discontent which his conduct had excited through the nation. Gregory XI., who then filled the Papal chair, resided at Avignon, of whom, in the name of Edward and the English people, it was demanded that he should entirely desist from those unlawful practices by which their rights and property had been violated by him. By this remonstrance some partial concessions were gained, but not such as to satisfy the parliament. An act was therefore passed intended to protect the community from the rapacious encroachments of the popes, by declaring the election of bishops to be complete-

ly independent of the Papal sanction,—thus by implication denying the spiritual as well as the temporal supremacy of the pontiffs.

The partiality of the popes who resided at Avignon to the interests of France was so well known as to exert a decided influence on the popular feeling in England. Not only were injustice and selfishness seen to govern that court, but also a process of exhaustion was carried on against the one country, chiefly to add to the resources of the other, then her most powerful adversary. At such a crisis of the popular feeling, the labors of Wicliff, now in the fullness of his strength, could not fail to become particularly efficient. His zeal and learning were applied to demonstrate, that the authority assumed by the pontiffs, and by many of the national clergy, respecting the affairs of states, and ecclesiastical property, was, in most instances, usurpation, and a wide departure from the maxims which had been revered by the Christian priesthood in the better ages of the church. He, at the same time, labored to show, that the effort of the commons to reform spiritual grievances was neither novel nor obtrusive, but a legitimate exercise of power. Nor does there appear to have been any misgiving felt by the parliament as to the propriety of entering upon

the ground they had taken; while the popes were regarded as the centre of a body of men, who, under the garb of sanctity, were living in the indulgence of every worldly passion. So inveterate, too, was this disease considered, that all hopes of recovery appear to have been relinquished. But what the priest refused to attempt, the magistrate was determined to accomplish.

In 1374 another embassy was sent to the pope to attempt an adjustment of the differences existing between the English nation and the Papal court. The second person named in the royal commission for this embassy is John de Wicliif, a fact which proves the importance attached to his views and opinions by the court. It can hardly be supposed that the king and the secular lords were not then informed as to the reformer's sentiments upon the subjects at issue, and the selection of an individual otherwise of but little consideration for so important a mission, proves that his views were both known and appreciated by the ruling powers. Their negotiations with the Papacy were not conducted at the seat of that court, but at Bruges, a town long connected with the famous Hanseatic league, and then enjoying a high degree of commercial prosperity, and a spirit of

independence at that time but little known in Europe. From what is known of Rome during the middle ages, it was certainly politic to prevent enlightened men from too nearly observing the manners that generally prevailed among the nearest dependents of that court; but it shows a want of foresight that he was sent into such a place as Bruges, where his already troublesome notions of liberty would be excited and strengthened by what he should there behold. The steady resistance presented by the citizens of that town to every oppressive exaction, from both civil and ecclesiastical rulers, would naturally excite his admiration. His present commission had arisen from a similar feeling among his own countrymen; and that he returned increasingly zealous to strengthen and mature it, is no matter of conjecture.

It should also be noticed, that during his stay at Bruges, that place became the seat of negotiations between the ambassadors of France and those of England, under the mediation of the pope's representatives. This embassy was of a most august character, embracing, on the part of France, two brothers of the reigning prince, and on that of England, among others of the first rank in church and state, John, duke of Lancaster. The character in which Wicliff ap-

peared at Bruges would secure him ready access to these dignified persons, and thus lead him to a more intimate knowledge of the intrigues which too commonly prevail in the diplomacy of states, and in a still greater degree in that of the Church of Rome. The lessons there learned, however painful, were doubtless of much practical importance.

Our information respecting the progress of the negotiation which chiefly claimed the attention of Wicliff is imperfect. They came to Bruges about August, 1374, and in September, 1375, the pope addressed six bulls to the English monarch, treating of the questions at issue between them. In these documents it was provided, that no person, at present in possession of any benefice in England, should be disturbed by any interference of the pope's authority; that the reservation of benefices which had been declared by the former pope, but not yet acted upon, should be annulled; that the title of certain clergymen, which had been questioned by the late pope, should be confirmed, remitting also the demands usually made in such cases; and that an assessment of the revenues of certain cardinals, holding livings in England, should be made, to effect a repair of their churches, and other ecclesiastical buildings,

which had fallen into decay—the extent of such assessment to be determined by a jury convened in the neighborhood. It was generally the policy of the Papal courts, when pressed toward an unfavorable treaty, to seek to gain time, and often to amuse by seeming concessions, till a change of affairs should permit them to resume openly what they had only partially surrendered. Thus, in the letters to the king of England, after a delay of more than a year, there was no surrender of pontifical claims. The abuses complained of were corrected only so far as they related to certain specified cases, while every *principle* of the whole system of usurpation remained untouched. In April, 1376, we learn, from a royal message to parliament, that the commissioners were still at Bruges—an evidence that the concessions of the Papacy had not given satisfaction. But Edward was rapidly sinking under the increasing infirmities of old age; his influence on the continent was greatly diminished; and faction had made considerable inroads upon the domestic policy of his kingdom. In such a state of things it were not to be expected that large concessions would be made by such a court as that which then claimed to be the head of the church of Christ. It was agreed that for the future the pope should

desist from the reservation of benefices: but it was also required that the king should no more confer them by his own writ. The official confirmation of the elections of bishops and abbots, which had been assumed by the popes, was among the matters complained of by the English commissioners; but the prize was of too much value as a source of revenue to be easily wrung from the grasp of a court that fattened on the price of simony. In short, after two years' labor, the ambassadors returned without accomplishing any reforms in the practices of the Papal courts, but rather having confirmed the grounds of its usurpation, receiving in return only the redress of a few individual grievances, and a few promises, made only to amuse for awhile, but never to be kept. The cause of this entire failure may be, at least, in part, guessed at, when it is remembered that immediately after the return of the royal commissioners, their leader was promoted to the bishopric of Hereford, and subsequently to that of St. David's,—and in both cases by Papal provisions. With corrupted churchmen as royal ambassadors, the corrupt head of a rotten hierarchy would not fail to accomplish his purposes, however glaring might be their iniquity.

Wicliff, who probably regarded the extent

of the claims which he was called to advocate as only part of what might have been justly demanded, was more than disgusted by the result of that protracted negotiation. Such also was the development of Papal corruption made during his discussions with the envoys of the pontiff, that his rebukes, which had been hitherto only remotely aimed at the head of the church, were, after that time, directed against it with unsparing severity. He had learned to regard the popes as men, whose elevation served only to diffuse more widely the pestilent example of an insatiable love of gain. The covetousness, and the secular ambition, which had so successfully claimed the reputation of a zeal for piety, were stripped of their disguise ; and the stimulus thus imparted to his spirit of inquiry, gave a wider extent and a more determined character to his efforts against the prevailing corruptions.

On his return Wicliff received from his sovereign an unequivocal testimony of his continued favor. In November, 1375, (probably before he arrived in his native country,) he was presented by the king to the prebend of Aust, in the collegiate church of Westbury. About the same time, the rectory of Lutterworth in Leicestershire became vacant ; and,

in consequence of the minority of the patron, the appointment of a rector devolved on the crown. Wicliff was also appointed to that place, by the royal favor.

The interval that thus brought honors and preferment to the reformer, involved his noble friend and patron, the duke of Lancaster, in a series of difficulties, from which he never fully escaped. It is impossible, at this distant period, to apprehend with certainty the causes of actions which manifested themselves in the conduct of the several parties therein concerned. It is known that the war, which had long been prosecuted with much zeal by the English nation, and which had so greatly intoxicated the national vanity, had for several years ceased to be a source of applause and military glory. The scale of prosperity had turned in favor of the enemy. The measures of government, of course, became less acceptable, and the duke of Lancaster, on whom, from the advanced age of the king, and the bad health of the Black Prince, the cares of government chiefly devolved, found himself exposed to much of the growing petulence and prejudice. A strange and unnatural combination of parties seems to have been made against him. Whether his elder brother ever really joined with his ene-

mies is very uncertain, for while on the one hand we find the name of the heir apparent connected with measures designed to render John of Gaunt the subject of popular disaffection ; on the other we see him recognizing the duke in terms of affection, and placing him among the executors of his last will. That the prelates hated the duke of Lancaster is neither doubtful nor at all strange ; and it is also probable that they did not hesitate to avail themselves of the popular odium growing out of the late want of success of the army upon the continent, though at the risk of giving additional importance to the increasing powers of the commons. The proceedings of the parliament which met at that time are marked by strong measures, many of which affected persons high in the royal favor, and intimately connected with the royal person. It would seem, however, that the favor of the king and the duke of Lancaster was sufficient to protect their friends, till more deliberate reflection produced less violent counsels. These events, however, prove that the commons were becoming a powerful agent in the affairs of the kingdom, and plainly indicate the progress of the constitutional character of the kingdom.

And while the energy of the lower house

was thus effectively employed against the existing administration, and preparing so important a precedent in the parliamentary history of the country, its exposure of ecclesiastical disorders are made with the same unsparing hand, exhibiting them as evidently descending from the head of the hierarchy to the lowest of its members. But the latter class of evils were found to be less susceptible of correction by the representatives of the English people, than those which pertained purely to the affairs of the state. Yet the tone of remonstrance then adopted is worthy of notice. The sufferings and disasters of the kingdom are set forth in strong, doubtless in extravagant terms; but these untoward affairs, whether of war, famine, or disease, are imputed to the mal-practices of the popes and cardinals. They state, that the taxes paid to the court of Rome for ecclesiastical dignities amounted to five times more than those obtained by the king from the whole produce of the realm; that persons, altogether unworthy and unlearned, were promoted to the best livings, to the prejudice of learning and religion; and that public enemies, who never saw, nor cared to see, their parishioners, had these livings, “whereby they despise God’s service, and convey away the trea-

sure of the realm." Such were some of the proceedings of an assembly on which the admiration of the people conferred the name of "the good parliament." The only perplexing circumstance respecting it is, that its measures should have involved so much hostility to the duke of Lancaster. Nor is it easy to suppose that men so zealous in the cause of ecclesiastical reformation would have been induced to sacrifice so efficient a partisan, had they not been led to anticipate the most active succor from their new allies, the bishops, who were known to be his enemies. If such, however, was their expectation, they were (as they deserved to be) painfully deceived; and the duke's adherence to their object, notwithstanding the wound thus received from its friends, is no mean evidence of his sincerity.

The duke of Lancaster left Bruges, and embarked for England early in July, 1376. Before his arrival, the parliament, which had dealt so severely with him, was dissolved. The prince of Wales, also, the ornament of chivalry, and the victor of Cressy and Poictiers, had breathed his last on a bed of sickness. The king, dissatisfied with some of the proceedings of the late parliament, declared the duke, now his oldest son, his principal associate in

the government; and recalled those who had been expelled from his court by the parliament. In the subsequent treatment of some of the leading spirits of that parliament we may discover the sentiments of the court toward the authors of the obnoxious measures of that assembly. The commons, no doubt, deserved well of the nation, but they had been made the dupes of designing lords and prelates; and, in return for the sacrifice of the great advocate of their rights against their chief oppressors, the lords spiritual, they had received only empty promises of reforms.

About six months later another parliament met, which proved to be more devoted to the polities and the power of John of Gaunt. At this period the doctrines of Wicliff are first spoken of by the English clergy, as calling for official interference. It was well known that to attack the rector of Lutterworth was an indirect method of assailing his noble patron, who now presided in the councils of the sovereign. Courtney, one of the most imperious churchmen of the age, had been recently elevated to the see of London, and become fully committed against the duke of Lancaster, by his conduct in the parliament of the preceding year. The zeal of this prelate was now employed to rouse

and concentrate the indignation of his order against the opinions and conduct of Wicliff; who at the next convocation was cited to appear before his ecclesiastical superiors to answer to certain charges against him, of holding and publishing many erroneous and heretical doctrines. The 19th of February, 1377, was fixed for hearing his defense, at which time the populace gathered in great numbers at St. Paul's, the place of the convocation. The disposition of the multitude seems to have been quite averse to the duke of Lancaster, and of course, Wicliff must, to some extent, have partaken of their displeasure: still it is evident that his opinions were not unacceptable to the inhabitants of London, who, a Popish chronicler affirms with indignation, were nearly all Lollards. Of the multitude there assembled, the immediate dependents of the clergy (who were then accustomed, in imitation of the nobility, to keep a large number of retainers) probably formed the greater part: while others, influenced probably by the malicious rumors set afloat by them, had also come together, full of seditious fury.

At the appointed time, Wicliff was attended to St. Paul's by the duke of Lancaster and Lord Henry Percy, the earl marshal. The scene that ensued was exceedingly tumultuous.

The crowd was so great that it was with no little difficulty that a passage could be made for Wicliff and his illustrious companions to approach the spot where the prelates were assembled. Some disturbance arising in their passage through the crowd, attracted the notice of Courtney, who, doubtless, far from being gratified at seeing his intended victim attended by the two most powerful subjects of the crown, prepared to shield him from the meditated vengeance of his enemies. The prelate, therefore, manifested some impatience, and even went so far as to express his regret that he had not taken measures to exclude them from the court. The duke took this as an insult, and replied with some warmth, that in such matters the authority of the bishop should not regulate his conduct. Lord Percy entered into the same feeling; and so when the parties had come together, he desired Wicliff to be seated, observing that such indulgence was necessary, as he would have much to answer. This was too much for the haughty spirit of the prelate, who violently opposed the proposed favor, declaring that such conduct in the person accused must be interpreted as a contempt of the court. The duke seconded the suggestion of the earl marshal, whereupon a violent personal alterca-

tion ensued—the duke insulting and threatening violence to the prelate, and he, in return, railing and brawling at the duke, till his noble adversary blushed at being outdone in hard language by the bishop. The spirit of tumult was quickly communicated to the excited multitude, who, being composed chiefly of the bishop's dependents, and of the common people of London, with whom the duke of Lancaster was far from being popular, took part with the prelates; and the parties being compelled to separate in disorder, the prosecution was for the present suspended. The tumult, however, did not end here; the duke of Lancaster was insulted by the mob in his own palace; and a clergyman, who was mistaken for the earl marshal, was murdered in the street. The mob was at last dispersed by the bishop of London; and soon after the mayor and aldermen of the city were removed from their offices, and their places filled by others better affected toward the court.

In all these violent proceedings, Wicliff appears to have remained a silent observer of the storm, which he had neither raised nor could now control. It is altogether unjust to charge upon him the blame due to the harsh manner of his noble defenders; and even their conduct

may plead the poor apology of the fashion of the times. The barons of the middle ages were generally distinguished by violence of manner and harshness in their language, and even churchmen were often not their inferiors in the art of railing. Such scenes as that at St. Paul's were not of very rare occurrence in that and preceding ages, and this is rather a specimen of the customs of the times than an unusual event in their history.

The interval between February and October in 1377 appears to have been devoted by Wicliiff to the claims of his parish and the duties of his professorship. In the mean time Edward III. expired, and was succeeded in the throne by Richard, the eldest son of the Black Prince, a youth not yet twelve years old. In October the first parliament of the new sovereign assembled. As this body included nearly all the members of the late parliament, it may be presumed that the influence of the duke of Lancaster was not predominant in the kingdom. The course taken by the commons, however, still manifested a regard for that nobleman; for when they requested of the upper house that a council of twelve peers should be appointed to confer with them on the affairs of the kingdom, they nominated the duke as the

person to act as president. The proposal seems to have met the approbation of all parties except the duke himself, who seized this occasion to call attention to the rumors in circulation impeaching his loyalty, which, as he attributed them to certain members of the lower house, forbade him to become their adviser. At the same time he reminded them of his birth and standing, declaring that he would not agree to connect himself again with the affairs of the nation till the imputations cast upon him should be wholly removed. And the more strongly to attest his sincerity, he challenged his accusers to come forth, pledging himself to meet even the poorest knight in single combat, or in any other form, subject to the sanction of his peers. This brave appeal had its effect. The lords and prelates instantly surrounded the person of the duke, and repeated the assurances of their confidence ; and the commons appealed to their conduct in inviting him to become their principal adviser as their best defense ; and Lancaster at length consented to bury the past, on condition of obtaining a severe enactment against the authors of any such calumny in the future.

This parliament also reiterated the complaints formerly made against the shameless rapacity

and ruinous spoliations of the agents of the popes. They now demanded that the collecting of first-fruits, and the procuring of Papal provisions, should be punished with outlawry; that all aliens, as well religious as others, should be compelled to avoid the realm, and that all their lands and goods should be appropriated to the expenses of the war, in which the kingdom had been long engaged. They proceeded yet further, and, in view of the great necessity of the state of affairs, inquired,—“whether the kingdom of England, on an imminent necessity of its own defense, might lawfully detain the treasure of the kingdom, that it be not carried out of the land, although the lord pope require it, on pain of censures, and by virtue of the obedience due to him?” This momentous question, which involved the whole of the question of the pope’s supremacy, and had probably been called up by renewed exactions from the Papacy, made during a season of supposed weakness of the government of England, consequent upon the minority of the king, was referred for decision to the rector of Lutterworth. This act of the parliament not only indicates the state of public feeling toward the Papal court, but also refers this feeling directly to Wicliff, to whom they looked for further in

struction as to the proceedings necessary to complete the work of emancipation.

In his reply, the reformer, disregarding the opinions of the learned, the decisions of former laws, and the prescriptive authority of usages, deemed it sufficient to show the affirmative of "this doubt," from an appeal to common sense and natural right. Self-preservation, he argued, is the first instinct of every creature; and as it is found in inanimate things, in brutes, and in individuals of the human species, so it belongs also to communities, which, in the case of nations, comprehends, in one body, the clergy and the commonality. He further contends, that all power given by God may be justly used to that end, and, therefore, that the kingdom may lawfully detain its treasure for its own defense, whenever necessity demands it. He further describes the contributions made to the Papacy as alms; and alms, he contends, are properly bestowed on the recipient only as he is found to be in need. But the wealth of the Papal court was known to be far beyond its legitimate wants, while England was laboring under great embarrassments. From this position he again came to an affirmative conclusion of the proposed question. He next appealed to the example of Christ, who subsisted upon the alms

of poor women; of the apostles, who had no endowed benefices; and of the primitive churches, in which “the holders of any temporal possession held them in the form of perpetual alms.” And last of all, he quotes St. Bernard, who, in his second book to Pope Eugenius, strongly contends that no secular power can be challenged by the popes in virtue of their office, and as successors of St. Peter.

In this reply, we see the position to which Wicliff’s mind had come in its laborious struggles for deliverance from the meshes of superstitious authority. The fundamental principles of the English Reformation are found in that document, and a principle of vast importance in ecclesiastical affairs just now, for the first, rising into importance, is embraced in the notion that the contributions made to the church are to be considered as alms. This is the very soul of “the voluntary principle” so fully applied, and so amply demonstrated to be efficient in the maintenance of the institutions of religion, in Protestant America.

CHAPTER V.—1377-79.

WICLIFF'S CONFESSION OF DOCTRINES.

WE are nowhere directly informed of the nature of the charges that were to be preferred against Wicliff, before the convocation of St. Paul's. But it is known that very soon afterward the pope was possessed of certain statements of doctrine, said to be held and taught by the rector of Lutterworth ; and as these statements were received from England, they doubtless came from the persons who having tried their own authority, had found it too feeble to check the growing disaffection.

Wicliff's doctrines were now no secret, either in his own country or at the Papal court. Seventeen years had passed since his dispute with the mendicant orders, and ten since his appeal was made to the pope, respecting the wardenship of Canterbury Hall ; and nearly the same time since his spirited defense of the English parliament in refusing the pope's census. At Bruges he became personally known to the agents of the Papacy, and no doubt both the singularities of his character and the novelty of his opinions were duly noted and promptly reported at

Avignon. But the crafty prudence of that court occasioned a delay until the obnoxious doctrines should come under notice in a less questionable shape, and from sources apparently less partial. Some time in the summer of 1377, four bulls were sent into England, against the person and doctrines of John de Wicliif, rector of Lutterworth, and professor of the Sacred Page. These mandates, dated June, 1377, were addressed to the king, the primate, the bishop of London, and the university of Oxford ; requiring that Wicliif should be seized and imprisoned under the Papal authority, that his confession should be received, and distinct information of his tenets obtained, and that he should be detained in custody until further instructions were sent concerning him. If he could not be personally apprehended, citations were to be issued, commanding his attendance before the pope within three months ; the utmost care was to be taken to prevent the king and nobility being defiled with his errors.

The arrogance of these requisitions of the Papacy was attempted to be covered by profuse laudations of the English nation, and especially of the English church ; which is spoken of “as having produced among her clergy, men enriched with a pure knowledge of the Scriptures,

grave, devout, and the defenders of orthodoxy." But it is regretted that the zeal of the fathers had not been inherited by their children. "The report of heresy could now be distinctly heard at Rome, while the evil remained unopposed in England." In the letter addressed to the king, after informing him of the nature of the instructions given to the prelates, the pontiff requires him, from his veneration for the apostolic see, to grant them his countenance and protection in the discharge of the duties therein imposed. The university is admonished of the signs of religious declension in England, and the doctrines of Wicliff are again described as alike hostile to the church and to all civil authority. That learned body is therefore enjoined, under severe pains and penalties, to prevent the teaching of any such conclusions as were imputed to him, and to cause his person to be committed to the custody of the archbishop of Canterbury, or the bishop of London. Should others, defiled by his errors, attempt a resistance of this mandate, it is required, that they should be dealt with in the same summary manner.

Though dated in the month of June, these Popish missiles did not make their public appearance in England till five months later. It is probable that the confidence placed in the learn-

ing and integrity of the reformer, by the parliament, had created new alarm ; and that his decisive answer to the question proposed by that body had destroyed all hope of silencing him by gentle means. Before that time Edward III. was no more, and the letter soliciting his aid was probably never presented to his successor.

In Oxford, the demands of the pontiff excited a serious discussion. The question of their reception was raised, and it was not without strong opposition that the Papal bull escaped the indignity of a formal rejection ; and in their subsequent conduct, nothing seemed further from the purpose of the heads of the university, than to sacrifice Wicliiff to the malice of his enemies. This caution was no doubt in part owing to the jealousy with which the Papal interference was in these ages regarded by such establishments. But the letter of the pontiff had anticipated opposition from the adherents of the reformer ; and accordingly it proved in this case sufficiently powerful to prevent the university from incurring the odium of at once denouncing its brightest ornament.

The appeal to the prelates was more successful. The primate wrote to the chancellor of Oxford, reminding him of the Papal mandate, and insisting on its being executed in all things

diligently and faithfully. He was also required to obtain, by the aid of the most orthodox and skillful divines, correct information as to the said heresies, and to convey with his statement of the opinions certainly propagated by Wicliif, his own judgment respecting them, delivered under the university seal. It was further enjoined him, that as chancellor he should cause the erroneous teacher personally to appear before his ecclesiastical superiors, in the church of St. Paul's, London, on the thirtieth court day, from the date of the citation.

In pursuance of the above-named citation, Wicliif appeared before the synod at Lambeth, early in 1378. The duke of Lancaster no longer ruled in the cabinet; but the deep impression which the reformer's doctrine had made upon the court and the people was now apparent. These surrounded the place in considerable numbers, and many even forced themselves into the chapel, declaring their attachment to the person and the opinions of the rector of Lutterworth; and presently Sir Lewis Clifford entered the court, and, in the name of the queen mother, forbade the bishops proceeding to any definite sentence against Wicliif.

Thus the wolves were again balked of their prey, even when they thought their victim se-

cured beyond the possibility of escape. A Popish annalist thus vents his spleen on the occasion. "The prelates," he observes, "shaken as a reed with the wind, became soft as oil in their speech, to the open forfeiture of their own dignity, and the injury of the whole church. With such fear were they struck, that you would think them men who hear not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs." The whole affair furnishes a curious indication of the turbulent spirit of those times ; and the irruption of the mob on the one hand, and the imperious message of the queen mother on the other, demonstrate that the influence of Wicliff had made formidable incursions into almost every region of society, from the highest to the lowest.

On this occasion Wicliff delivered a written statement of his opinions, which has been unfairly represented as an artful attempt to evade the consequences of his doctrines by apologies and explanations. A fair and full view of the case, however, is altogether adequate to his justification. It should first be remembered that, beyond doubt, opinions were attributed to him that he had never entertained ; and therefore it should be no matter of surprise, that his tenets, as explained by himself, should seem less extravagant than as put forth by his enemies.

His reasoning at that time partook largely of the scholastic method then almost universally in use among the learned ; and though the present race of men may reject its puerilities, they should also remember that fashionable conceits often influence the best and wisest of men. The document itself, as transmitted to the present times, is not wholly free from suspicion. It comes to us through the hands of his most unscrupulous enemies, while it is known that a copy subsequently published by the author differs from the first in several important particulars. And last of all, we should remember that so far were the prelates from being satisfied with his explanations, that they strictly forbade him to repeat such propositions either in the schools or in his sermons, "lest the laity should be made to stumble ;"—"an injunction," says the Popish chronicler, "which he treated with contempt, and persisted in scattering conclusions still more pernicious."

This second paper, referred to above, was delivered to the parliament, which met soon after the affair above related occurred. It was rather fuller than the first, and being addressed to laymen rather than scholars, he mostly discarded the scholastic logic, and wrote in a more diffuse style, which rendered his statements more explicit. These papers, especially the latter, afford us a

faithful exhibition of his views, as then entertained, of the limits of the Papal power. His introductory remarks are too valuable to be omitted; they are as follows:—"In the first place, I protest publicly, as I have often done, that I resolve with my whole heart, and by the grace of God, to be a sincere Christian; and, while life shall last, to profess and to defend the law of Christ as far as I have power. If through ignorance, or from any other cause, I shall fail in this determination, I ask forgiveness of God, and retracting the error, submit with humility to the correction of the church. And to prevent the Christian from being scandalized on my account, since I am prosecuted for my faith, and since the notions of children, and of weak persons, concerning what I have taught, are conveyed by others, who are more than children, beyond the seas even to the court of Rome, I am willing to commit my opinions to writing. These, also, I am now ready to defend even unto death; and the same duty I regard as binding upon all Christians, but particularly on the bishop of Rome, and on the whole priesthood of the church. In my conclusions I have followed the sacred Scriptures and the holy doctors, both in their meaning and in their modes of expression; this I am willing to show; but should it be

proved that such conclusions are opposed to the faith, I am prepared, very willingly, to retract them." This is indeed a declaration worthy of the man and of the cause he was called upon to defend, being characterized alike by firmness and discretion, and clearly indicates that he was not to be intimidated into meanness, nor bullied into precipitancy.

In the pope's list of charges the several articles are arranged and numbered without regard to their relative import; they may however be reduced to several distinct classes. The first requiring attention relates to the nature of the tenure by which ecclesiastics hold their office; and in his far-reaching conclusions, he embraced the sovereign pontiff in common with the ordinary clergy. His doctrine on this subject was doubtless highly unacceptable to the adherents of the Papacy. From the fourth century to the present period it had been the efforts of the popes and of their flatterers to place the accredited representatives of St. Peter above all human control. Against this dangerous and impious tenet Wicliff delivered his solemn protest. He is said to have stated that, in certain cases, an ecclesiastic, and even the bishop of Rome, may be corrected by his inferiors, not only from among

the clergy, but from the laity also ; and that this might be done whenever the good of the church should require it. In support of this view of the case he presumes the pope to be liable to all the sinful infirmities of human nature, and thence he infers that he should be subject to the laws of brotherly reproof. He then continues :—“ If it be evident therefore, that the college of cardinals are remiss in performing this service, for the necessary welfare of the church, it is obvious that others, and it may chance principally the laity, may reprove and implead him, and reduce him to a better life.” He indeed confesses, that such a work should not be rashly undertaken, but he also remarks, that where ground for such a proceeding really exists, to shrink from the duty is to confess the pope to be an offender beyond the hope of recovery. What is here assumed as applying to the head of the hierarchy, would of course be extended to its inferior members. The right of the people to judge of what is good for the church is distinctly asserted as the foundation of this doctrine ; an assumption which covers the basis not only of all reformations in the church, but also of all religious liberty.

In the second place, notice may be taken of the charges brought against the reformer rela-

tive to his notions of the rights of the civil magistrates over ecclesiastical endowments, and of his own statements in reply. He confessedly held the temporalities of the church to be altogether subject to the civil authorities ; but at no period did he sanction an invasion of the property of the clergy to the injury of the church, nor for its good, except in forms and cases limited by law. The requisite corrections were not to be effected by the misguided passions of the multitude, nor by the rapacity of irreligious statesmen, but to be regulated by a devout reference to the law of Christ. In certain of the pope's articles he is accused of teaching, that all church endowments are left conditionally, that if the clergy fail to apply their wealth to the end which it was designed to promote, it devolves on the magistrate to enforce such an application of it ; and that in every such case, the civil power is not only authorized to do this, but, if needful to the reformation of the order, to deprive churchmen of their possessions entirely ; and this, though the most alarming censures of the church should be employed to prevent it. Such is the doctrine which Wicliff is described as holding with respect to the enormous wealth of the ecclesiastical orders ; and, in his conclusions, instead of

being denied, evaded, or softened down, it is fully and distinctly acknowledged as a part of his creed.

It was thus that the reformer denied to the Roman bishops the sovereignty which they had so long claimed with respect to the property of every religious establishment in Europe. In his theory, the last appeal is made to the crown, and not to the mitre; and the parties so appealing, if menaced by the thunders of the church, have a sufficient protection in the certain justice of their cause. The reader will perceive that, in the supposed case, the balance of integrity and discernment, in judging as to the nature of religion, and as to the best means of promoting it, is presumed to be in favor of the laity, as opposed to the clergy—a presumption that will generally be found well grounded wherever the clerical order is constantly exposed to the corrupting influence of rich endowments. It was, doubtless, by such steps that the minds of the English people were prepared to adopt two maxims, both of which were strictly necessary to the emancipation of their country: first, that a reduction of ecclesiastical property may be essential to a permanent ecclesiastical reform; and, secondly, that to effect this, the power of the magistrate is fully competent.

In one of his conclusions he states that every priest, truly ordained to that office, is competent to administer any and all of the sacraments of the church. In defense of this doctrine he contends that the sacred office "is a matter which may not exist in a degree, either more or less." To perceive the practical bearing of this doctrine, it must be kept in mind, that under the name of sacraments were included those ecclesiastical rites which, in all prelatrical hierarchies, have been held to pertain exclusively to a superior order of ministers, especially that of ordination; and, therefore, this conclusion goes directly against the assumption of the divine rights of bishops. That there may be just ground for restraining or extending the official services of the inferior clergy, according to existing practices, is admitted; but the distinction between such and their prelates consists simply in a difference of *jurisdiction*, and not in a difference of *character*.

Eight of the articles of this series relate to the nature of spiritual censures, and to the principles which should regulate their application. With respect to the latter, the reformer contends that they should never be employed as the instruments of revenge, nor as a punishment for withholding temporal offerings from

the clergy. In another of his productions, this point is illustrated by the example of the Saviour, when he refused to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans, though they had most wickedly denied him the rights of hospitality. The practice of exacting a revenue for the clergy, by joining the power of the magistrate to the spiritual censures of the priest, is also condemned, as being at variance with the lessons and examples of holy writ, and of the fathers: while, on the other hand, it is admitted that there are some human causes with which the sanctions of religion may be connected, as an auxiliary influence; but in these extreme cases, it is the relation of the offense to the divine law which calls for the interposition of an authority so sacred, and so much abused.

Such was, then, Wicliff's avowed doctrine as to the use of ecclesiastical censures, in relation to the temporal affairs of the church. In his statement, published immediately afterward, it is repeated, that the employment of the penalty of excommunication, and of the power of the magistrate, as instruments to swell the revenue of the priesthood, are customs which were unknown in the better ages of Christianity; and the change from the system of voluntary contribution to that of force is deplored as one of

the worldly corruptions introduced into the church with her endowment under Constantine.

But it was not only the improper application of this power that the reformer was anxious to correct; the power itself, as generally understood, he regarded as imaginary; and the practices connected with it were devoutly opposed, as involving the most serious delusion and impiety. "It is impossible," he observes, "that the [so called] vicar of Christ, merely by his bulls, with the concurrence of his college of cardinals, should really qualify or disqualify any man. In every qualifying of a subject it is first required that the subject to be qualified should be meet and worthy of it; and in every act of disqualification, there must first be some demerit in the person disqualified requiring it; consequently, the act of qualifying or disqualifying, is not simply from the ministry of the vicar of Christ, but from above, or from some other cause." The assumption of an unconditional authority in the forms of binding and loosing is pronounced to be destructive of the whole Catholic faith—to be a usurpation of the Lord's absolute power, and no less than blasphemy. But while the humble worshiper is assured that he has nothing to fear from the

censures of men so long as he shall be a follower of that which is good, he is wisely admonished that the sentence of the priest is not to be indiscriminately condemned, since it may, in some cases, be the echo of that pronounced against him by a much higher power. The substance of his teaching, on this momentous question, amounts to about this:—that men should render themselves familiar with what the law of God prohibits and enjoins; and confiding in their own judgment, instead of yielding their conscience to a priest, should feel dismayed by the frown of the church, and persuaded of safety as connected with her smile, only as her curse or blessing should be known to hold agreement with the recorded will of the Eternal.

These were the reformer's opinions, as stated to the Papal delegates in the commencement of the year 1378. The document there rendered by him, it will be observed, contained but little referring, except by implication, to what may, with strict propriety, be termed theological opinions. These, indeed, are taught by implication, and, as so implied, are no less valuable than would be direct statements. Its chief value, however, consists in its being a definite record of Wicliff's sentiments at this period respecting the pretensions of the Papacy,

and the scarcely less extravagant claims of the great body of the clergy, in every state of Christendom; also, as to the authority of the magistrate as compared with that of churchmen; and as to the power of the priest over the present character and future allotment of the worshiper. On all these topics his opinions were shown to be such as to provoke the serious displeasure of the ecclesiastical orders. But the mind which had learned to view the spiritual weapons of the church as powerless, except when employed according to the teachings of holy writ, was not to be dismayed by them when directed against conclusions which had been adopted as the result of much painful and devout investigation. The silence imposed on him by the synod, to which it was submitted, is sufficient evidence that his judges perceived the dangerous tendency of his doctrines. A professor of divinity, who taught the right of the laity to judge, and even to correct the clergy, not excepting the sovereign pontiff himself, must have appeared to the ecclesiastics of the fourteenth century as an unsafe preceptor of youth. And to assert the authority of the crown as supreme and final, as to cases of ecclesiastical property, was to take a position against which the court of Rome and inferior

synods had arrayed their most powerful engines of destruction. Nor was it less hazardous at that period to treat the distinctions of orders which had obtained in the hierarchy as merely those of jurisdiction, and as altogether of human origin. Such attacks upon the outworks of the system of superstition would only expose him who should make them to the fearful anathemas of an incensed priesthood, if its doctrine of spiritual power was allowed to be unquestioned. This fiction of the spiritual thunders was the secret of their power; and hence we find Wicliff directing his attacks against this point; nor, in his explanations at Lambeth, was there a single proposition relating to this subject either relinquished, or in the slightest degree modified.

The Popish clergy at that period (as they do at present) held that the sentence of excommunication exposed its subjects to the fires of purgatory, and often to eternal torments; and yet it was frequently employed to avenge some trivial offense, or to extort some paltry contribution. This facility in adopting such fearful instrumentalities, indicates that even churchmen considered the whole system little better than a pious cheat. To suppose them sincere in their pretended beliefs, is to regard

them more nearly allied to the nature of devils than that of men. On this subject, the religion and the humanity of Wicliff spoke too loudly to be misunderstood. He saw the polity and doctrine so contrived as to present the ecclesiastical orders as the representatives of the Almighty; and so to identify any act of opposition to their wills with whatever is revolting in impiety. To deliver his fellow-men from this snare of the devil was his greatest solicitude, for which purpose he exposed the inconsistencies, the worldliness, and the cruelty so evident in the exercise of that spiritual authority which was thus assumed. The maxim, "By their fruits ye shall know them," was applied to the clergy no less than to the laity; and to raise the popular mind from its entire prostration to the will of its ghostly masters, men were urged to study the principles of their faith, and to examine every claim of their spiritual shepherds, however sanctioned by precedents or names.

The statements relative to the power of qualifying and disqualifying, though expressed in general terms, were evidently intended to correct the false and dangerous notions of sacramental efficacy, then taught, especially as regards the so-called sacraments of penance and

orders. They were evidently so understood by those who had most to fear from the propagation of such doctrines. Wicliff had no intention to overthrow any portion of the salutary discipline of the church, but he loudly condemned the abuses of that discipline for sordid and vicious purposes. The efficacy of the sacramental act he held to be dependent on the character of the parties on whom it should terminate. Hence, the impenitent offender, though absolved by the priest, is still considered liable to his Maker's displeasure ; and clerks, boasting of the sanctity which episcopal consecration was supposed to have conferred, were often denounced as “hypocrites by profession, children of the fiend, and worse than the men of Sodom.” To prove from the Scriptures, and from the early fathers—as he attempted to do—that such were the doctrines of Christian antiquity, was to sound the knell of priestcraft.

Wicliff’s escape from the snare of his adversaries, and the reiteration of his most obnoxious opinions, could hardly fail to provoke every kind of attack that might promise to diminish his influence. An anonymous writer, styled by the reformer, in his reply, a *motley theologian*, immediately assailed the point of his doctrine which impeached the Papal infallibility. He

seems to go so far as to deny that the pope was capable of mortal sin, and to declare that whatever he should ordain must be just. In his reply, Wicliff pushes these assumptions to their necessary and legitimate consequences ; showing that, if they be true, the pontiff may exclude any book from the sacred canon, and introduce any novelty in its place ; and so the whole Bible might become heresy, and falsehood Catholic truth. The reformer then adverts to the efforts of the pontiff to work his ruin, because he had dared to question this assumption, and others equally impious. He then proceeds to explain more fully than before the doctrines for which he had been arraigned before the Papal delegates, and to give them an application still more averse to the prevailing notions. He is especially severe against the monstrous assumptions by the pope, of the power of binding and loosing ; and does not hesitate to declare, that the abettor of such a trust, whoever he may be, is a blasphemer, a heretic, and one whom Christians ought not to tolerate—certainly not as their leader, since his guidance can only serve to lead them to destruction. He therefore calls upon the secular lords to resist the arrogant claims of the pope, both on account of their heresy and their infringement of

their own rights of property, and of civil jurisdiction.

The subjoined extract will give some idea of the manner in which he reasoned on the bearings of that spiritual authority which the most distinguished churchmen of the age were concerned to maintain. “Let it once be admitted that the pope, or one representing him, does indeed bind or loose whenever he affects to do so, and how shall the world stand? For if, when the pontiff pretends to bind all who oppose him in his acquisition of temporal things, either movable or immovable, with the pains of eternal damnation, such persons assuredly are so bound,—it must follow as among the easiest of things for the pope to wrest unto himself all the kingdoms of the world, and to subvert or destroy every ordinance of Christ. And since, for a less fault than this usurpation of divine power, Abiather was deposed by Solomon, Peter was reproved to the face by Paul, nay, and many popes have been deposed by emperors and kings,—what should be allowed to prevent the faithful uttering their complaints against this greater injury done to their God? For on the ground of this impious doctrine, it would be easy for the pope to invert all the arrangements of the world; seizing, in connection with the

clergy, on the wives, the daughters, and all the possessions of the laity, without opposition, inasmuch as it is their saying, that even kings may not deprive a churchman of aught, neither complain of his conduct, let him do what he may, while obedience must be instantly rendered to whatever the pope may decree." Such was the tyranny of the system which Wicliff labored to demolish; and so devoutly was his doctrine adjusted to operate as an ax upon its roots.

In the early part of the year 1379 Wicliff was visited by a severe attack of disease, occasioned probably, or at least greatly aggravated, by his excessive labors and perpetual vexations. The mendicants conceived this a favorable opportunity to extort from him some confession which they might turn to their own advantage, and by which some reparation would be made for the harm he had done them. Accordingly four doctors were chosen, one from each of the four fraternities, to whom were joined four senators, composing a grave embassy, to visit the dying offender. On entering his chamber, they found the sick man stretched upon his bed, to whom they at first expressed themselves kindly as to his comfort and speedy recovery. But presently they reminded him of the many

wrongs he had done to their orders, and as death was now probably at hand, they exhorted him to confess his errors, and revoke whatever he had thus said or written. The reformer heard them through in motionless silence ; then ordering his servant to raise him in his bed, he fixed his eyes upon his obtrusive guests, and with all his remaining energy replied : “ *I shall not die, but live, and again declare the evil deeds of the friars.* ” Surprised and chagrined by the firmness, as well as abashed by the energy of their antagonist, the doctors and their attendants retreated from the apartment, leaving their invincible adversary, as usual, the victor in the contest. The whole affair is highly characteristic of the times, and the persons engaged, and affords a fit subject for the pencil of a Raphael.

CHAPTER VI.—1379–80.

PAPAL SCHISM—WICLIFF AS A PREACHER.

In the ecclesiastical history of the fourteenth century, a prominent place belongs to the affair of the translation of the seat of the Papacy from Rome to Avignon, in the year 1305 ; and the consequent schism in the Papacy which occur-

red in 1378, and continued for more than forty years, during which time two or three rival popes claimed at once the high prerogatives of the apostolical see. During the last years of the preceding century a violent controversy was carried on between the pope and the French monarch, which remained unsettled at the death of the former, in 1304; but so great was the influence of the latter in the college of cardinals, that he procured the election of the archbishop of Bordeaux to the pontificate, whom he induced to remain in France, after his election, and to set up his court at Avignon. The period of the residence of the Papal court at its trans-alpine capital, (which continued a little more than seventy years,) was styled, by the Italians, the Babylonish captivity.

During this "captivity," the Papacy was almost wholly subject to the dictation of the French monarchs, and consequently at the death of Gregory XI., in 1378, three-fourths of the cardinals were found to be Frenchmen. When these assembled to choose a new pope, the Roman populace, aware that in all probability the choice would fall upon a Frenchman, gathering tumultuously around the place of meeting, and uttering the most alarming menaces, demanded the election of an Italian. The affright-

ed cardinals immediately pronounced the archbishop of Bari, a Neapolitan, the object of their choice. The new pontiff, who assumed the name of Urban VI., fixed his residence at Rome; but his enormities quickly exasperated his enemies and alienated his friends. Soon after, some of the leading cardinals again met in conclave, and, declaring the former election void, as being made under constraint, elected Robert, count of Geneva, to the pontificate, who took the name of Clement VII., and fixed his court at Avignon. France, and her allies, including Spain, Sicily, and Cyprus, acknowledged the authority of Clement; while England, and the rest of Europe, adhered to that of Urban. "Which of these two," says Mosheim, "is to be considered as the true and lawful pope, is, to this day, matter of doubt; nor will the records and writings alledged by the contending parties enable us to adjust that point with any certainty."

During the next half century, the church, which had long gloried in a pretended indivisible unity, was distracted by the most violent and formidable factions. The so-called body of Christ now presented the spectacle of a monster with two, and sometimes three, heads, each forming counter-plots, and launching their anathemas against each other. "The distress and

calamity of these times," continues the same writer, "are beyond all power of description; for, not to insist upon the perpetual contentions and wars between the factions of the several popes, by which multitudes lost their fortunes and lives, all sense of religion was extinguished in most places, and profligacy rose to a most scandalous excess. The clergy, while they vehemently contended which of the reigning popes was the true successor of Christ, were so excessively corrupt, as to be no longer studious to keep up even an appearance of religion or decency; and in consequence of all this, many plain and well-meaning people, who concluded that no one could possibly partake of eternal life unless united with the vicar of Christ, were overwhelmed with doubt, and plunged into the deepest distress of mind. Nevertheless, these abuses were, by their consequences, greatly conducive both to the civil and religious interest of mankind; for by these dissensions the Papal power received an incurable wound; and kings and princes, who had formerly been the slaves of the lordly pontiffs, now became their judges and masters. And many of the least stupid among the people had the courage to disregard and despise the popes, on account of their odious disputes about dominion, to commit their salva-

tion to God alone, and to admit as a maxim, that the prosperity of the church might be maintained, and the interests of religion secured and promoted, without a visible head, crowned with a spiritual supremacy.”*

Wicliiff, whose escape from the vengeance of the clergy was no doubt owing in a great degree to the distractions of the times, was fully aware of the aid which this state of things was capable of conferring on his efforts as a reformer. The schism had no sooner occurred than he published a tract “On the Schism of the Popes,” in which he speaks of this dispute as presenting a powerful inducement to attempt the destruction of those laws and customs which had served so greatly to corrupt the Christian priesthood, and to afflict the whole Christian community. The endowments of the church were designated as a principal cause of existing evils, and this property he affirms is capable of a more just and far less dangerous application. To effect a change so much to be desired, he does not, however, appeal to the passions of the few or the many, but to the sacred responsibilities of the sovereigns and rulers of Christendom. To give point to this exhortation, he renews his attack upon those superstitions from which the undue

* Mosheim. cent. xvi. part ii. chapter ii. section xv.

influence of the clergy had derived its being and continuance. The power of the clergy over the destiny of departed spirits is denied, and all their spiritual functions are declared to be only ministerial; so that whenever their decisions—as was often the case—should be opposed to moral propriety, or to the known will of God, they should be viewed as the impotent assumptions of mere human weakness or passion. His advice, therefore, is: “Trust we in the help of Christ on this point, for he hath begun already to help us graciously, in that he hath clove the head of antichrist, and made the two parts fight against each other. For it is not doubtful that the sins of the popes, which hath been so long continued, hath brought in this division.” He further urges, that “emperors and kings should help in this cause, to maintain God’s law, to recover the heritage of the church, and to destroy the foul sins of clerks, *saving their persons*. Thus should peace be established and simony destroyed.” Among the heresies established and taught by the church, he affirms that “there is no greater than for a man to believe that he is absolved from his sin, if he give money, or because a priest layeth his hand on the head, and saith, I absolve thee. For thou must be sorrowful in thy heart, or

else God absolveth thee not." In the same tract, the necessity of confession to a priest is denied no less distinctly than the pretended power of absolution. Having thus wrested the ghostly thunders from the hands of corrupt churchmen, he calls the secular authorities to the long-needed reformation of the church, both in its head and members.

This short treatise was evidently prepared with some haste, to meet the demands of the occasion, and was intended for present effect. Its character is decidedly inflammatory; but there can be but little doubt that it was just such an appeal as the state of affairs demanded. A galling clerical despotism of the most corrupt and sordid character had long afflicted Christendom; but at that period there was a prospect that a well-directed effort toward emancipation would be crowned with success. It is not denied that Wicliff was an incendiary, for such is every reformer; but the objects of his destructiveness were the antichristian doctrines and practices which disgraced the name of our holy religion.

About this time the reformer produced another work, larger and more elaborate than the fore-mentioned, entitled, "On the Truth and Meaning of Scripture." This is one of the largest, and the most systematically digested

of all his productions, imbodying almost every sentiment that distinguishes his writings. The supreme authority of the Scriptures; the unalienable right of private judgment; the power of the clergy; the sacraments of the church; together with almost every article of moral obligation, may be found largely discussed in this volume. Were this the only work of the reformer preserved to our times, it would alone be sufficient to merit, for its author, the first place among the intrepid advocates of truth and piety, in the annals of the church.

While by his writings Wicliff was impressing the minds of the higher classes of his countrymen, and by his divinity lectures was imbuing the youth of the university with the doctrines of the gospel, he was equally active in informing the common people through his pulpit instructions. Preaching at that time was not much in fashion, and the little that was performed, as a pretence of preaching Christ, had but a poor claim to that distinction. In no one particular, perhaps, is the difference between the simple Christianity of Protestantism and the devious follies of Romanism more clearly marked than in relation to the relative importance of preaching. According to the latter, the Christian system is a formal and sacramental religion, to

whose offices the most feeble and depraved are fully competent, *when formally and sacramentally initiated*, and whose ritual, duly observed, invariably secures to the worshiper all its benefits. The former places the formal and sacramental ordinances of the church in a subordinate and vastly inferior relation to the great business of proclaiming the verities of divine truth. The views of Christ and his apostles upon this great question are expressed in no doubtful terms. Our Lord preached, but baptized not; and the great apostle to the Gentiles declares that Christ sent him “not to baptize, but to preach the gospel;” and he also not only styles the preached gospel “the power of God unto salvation;” but asserts that when “the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.” No language can be more forcible and direct than that in which the sacred writers speak of the preaching of the cross, as the divinely appointed means of bringing the nations to the obedience of the gospel; and in all subsequent ages, in proportion as men have imbibed the spirit of primitive piety, has a prominence been assigned to this department of ministerial duty. But this divinely appointed means of the world’s salvation had long been

greatly neglected by the Romish ecclesiastics. Grostete deplored this state of things, and, with a view to supply the deficiency, availed himself of the labors of the preaching friars; but he discovered at length that this remedy was worse than the evil intended to be removed. Yet even in the hands of the friars, this instrumentality produced great effects, and had not their prosperity rendered them proud and induced great corruptions among them, the mendicants would have quickly superseded, in many of their offices, the parochial clergy, who confined themselves almost exclusively to the prescribed forms of the mass-book.

Wicliff deplored alike the neglect of so important a function by the secular clergy, and the abuse of it by the fraternities. The itinerant character of the ministry of the friars could not have displeased him, since he defended the same practice among his followers. But he complains, that for the truths of divine revelation they had substituted “fables—chronicles of the old world—and stories of the battles of Troy;” and that they had imposed religious delusions on the rich and the poor, to raise themselves to distinction, and to gratify their avarice and sensuality. He mourned in secret over the degradation of his fellow-countrymen, and over

that immense expenditure of wealth upon the clergy, which only served to perpetuate this worldly-mindedness, and thus to protract the spiritual bondage; and at the same time he devoted the energies of his soul to contribute something toward the delivery of his native land from its gloomy condition.

Some notion may be formed of his industry in this part of his duty, from the fact that nearly three hundred of his sermons have survived the malignant efforts of his enemies to effect the destruction of all that he had written. It was not unusual to see this friend and confidant of kings and nobles—this first theological teacher in the kingdom—in a village pulpit, surrounded by his rustic auditory; or in the lowest hovels of the poor, fulfilling his office at the bedside of the sick and dying. In a treatise, composed some years before the time now spoken of, he had inculcated the duty of uniting with the devotions of the sabbath a regular attention to the wants of the afflicted and poor; and it is but just to presume that the duties thus enjoined on others were conscientiously performed by himself. But he especially inculcated that charity which manifests itself in love to the souls of our fellows, and hence the work of Christian instruction is described as “the best service a man may do for

his brother;" while priests who are found "in taverns, and hunting, and playing at their tables," instead of "learning God's law, and preaching," are denounced as "the foulest traitors," since among the duties of their office, "most of all is the preaching of the gospel."

But it was not only by his own example, nor merely by the addition of incidental expressions, that Wicliff showed his high estimate of the value of preaching. In his treatise against friars, written near the close of his life, he sets forth and defends his views and practices on this subject somewhat at large. A few extracts will exhibit his sentiments, and his manner of defending them:—"The highest honor that men may attain to on earth, is to preach the word of God. This service falls peculiarly to priests, and therefore God more straightly demands it of them. Hereby should they produce children to God, and that is the end for which God has wedded the church. Lovely it might be, to have a son that were lord of this world, but fairer much it were, to have a son in God, who, as a member of holy church, shall ascend to heaven. And for this cause, Jesus Christ left other works, and occupied himself mostly in preaching; and thus did his apostles, and for this God loved them." "He does

best, who best keeps the commandments of God. Now the first commandment of the second table bids us honor our elders, as our father and mother. But this honor should be first given to holy church, for she is the mother we should most love, and for her, as our faith teaches, Christ died. The church, however, is honored most by the preaching of God's word, and hence this is the best service that priests may render to God. Idleness in this office is to the church its great injury." . . . "Jesus Christ, when he ascended into heaven, commanded it especially to all his apostles, to preach the gospel to every man. So also when Christ spoke the last time to Peter, he bade him thrice, as he loved him, to feed his sheep; and this would not a wise shepherd have done, had he not himself loved it well. In this stands the office of the spiritual shepherd. As the bishops of the temple hindered Christ, so is he hindered by the hindering of this deed. And thus if our bishops preach not in their own persons, and hinder true priests from preaching, they are in the sin of the bishops who killed the Lord Jesus Christ."

In his work on "A feigned Contemplative Life" he examines and refutes the arguments usually employed in support of the indolent con-

templativeness of the cloister, against the activity and intercourse with the world that is necessarily required of a preacher. The superior excellence of an active life is shown from the example of Christ, who himself preached the gospel, and charged his disciples to preach it to all the world ;—also from the Old Testament, which declares that “the priest’s lips shall keep knowledge,”—and from the history of many of the most eminent persons whose names are honored of God in his holy word.

Such were the opinions of Wycliff, with respect to preaching, and from his adherence to these, arose much of his efficiency as a reformer. Opinions so true, so practical, and so plainly stated, could not have been reiterated in vain ; and we find them creating the class of men, styled by their leader “poor priests,” whose itinerant preaching, we shall hereafter see, was laboriously directed to discredit the superstitions, and to advance the piety, of their countrymen.

At the period under consideration, two principal methods of preaching were in use, technically distinguished by the terms “declaring” and “postillating.” In the former the preacher would announce his subject, and proceed to discuss it in the form of an essay or oration ; in the latter, he would first read a portion of Scripture,

and then proceed in order, to offer such remarks upon its several topics as were fitted to explain its meaning and secure its application. Each of these methods has its advantages, and both may be used to profit, upon fitting occasions. To appreciate and profit by the former, a good degree of knowledge of the subject is essential, while the latter is adapted to the wants and capacities of the most unlearned ; and in the state of Christian knowledge known then to have existed, the “postillating” method was that alone which could be rendered advantageous to most hearers. This method is still preserved and made available to the edification of the people, in most Protestant churches, in those less formal but often highly profitable discourses, called lectures. The present prevailing method of taking a paragraph or sentence for a text and building a discourse upon it, which began to grow into use about this time, unites the principal features of both those methods, and by a skillful adaptation may secure the advantages of both.

The sacred writings were too highly valued by Wicliif to be dispensed with as the obvious foundation of his pulpit instructions. His compositions for the pulpit, therefore, were nearly all of the class described as “postills ;” and what

is still more in their favor, they are almost wholly free from the scholastic mode of reasoning. They were produced at different periods, from 1376, when he became rector of Lutterworth, to the time of his death. In some instances they consist of little more than a few brief notes, appended to a vernacular translation of the lesson for the day ; in others they approach nearer to the length of a modern sermon. It does not appear probable, however, that even the fullest of these manuscripts were complete discourses, as delivered by the preacher ; since they often resemble mere outlines, rather than finished discussions, while he is known to have had great facility in extemporaneous communication. It is indeed the opinion of those best fitted to judge in the premises, that their publication was not anticipated by the author at the time of delivering them, but that this was done by his curate after his death. However that may be, there is no cause to doubt that they were delivered to the people of Lutterworth by their reputed author ; and, it may be added, there is scarcely an opinion adopted by Wicliff, the nature or the progress of which may not be illustrated from these voluminous remains. Throughout the whole the multiplied corruptions of the hierarchy are vigorously assailed,

as the great barrier to all religious improvement. The social obligations of men are frequently discussed, and traced with cautious firmness to the authority of the Scriptures; while the doctrines of the gospel are uniformly exhibited as declaring the guilt and the spiritual infirmities of men to be such as to render the atonement of Christ their only way of pardon, and the grace of the divine Spirit their only hope of purity.

In order properly to appreciate the value of these productions we must remember that they are remains of the ordinary pulpit instructions of a parish priest, in the fourteenth century,—a time when “darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people.” Preaching itself was then almost wholly superseded by the mummeries of the missal; and the little that passed under that name could have been called by any other, with quite as much propriety as that of the gospel of the Son of God.

Nor could it fail to attract notice, on account of its novelty, to see one possessed of so many advantages, both from his seat at the university and his favor at court, zealously and indefatigably employed in preaching the unadorned truths of religion to the untaught multitude; while most of the profession were found either seeking pleasure or pursuing schemes of worldly

ambition. This singular zeal and fidelity in the discharge of the duties of a parochial minister give plausibility to the conjecture that Wicliff may have been the real original of Chaucer's celebrated picture of the Village Priest. This conjecture becomes a probability when it is known, that not only were Chaucer and Wicliff the common proteges of the duke of Lancaster, but also that they were companions and intimate friends. The picture is inimitable, and is especially set off to advantage by its contrast with the worldly ambition of the secular clergy generally, and the equally odious hypocrisy of the begging friars.* If this presumption be

* As the reader may not have a copy of Chaucer at hand, the following extracts will not be altogether out of place :—

A good man there was of religion,
He was a poor parson of a town,
But rich he was in holy thought and work,
He was a learned man, also a clerk,
That Christ's gospel truly would preach,
His parishioners devoutly would he teach.
Benign he was and wondrous diligent,
And in adversity full patient,
And such a one he was proved oft sithes,* (* times)
For leth were he to curset for his tithes. († sue)

Wide was his parish, and houses far asunder,
But he ne'er left, neither for rain or thunder,

correct, it would not be easy to conceive of a more interesting spectacle than is presented in the various occupations of the reformer, at one time shaking the throne of antichrist, and again stooping to pour the consolations of the gospel

In sickness nor in mischief, for to visit
The furthest in his parish, great or light.

He set not his benefice to hire,
Nor left his sheep encumbered in the mire,
And ran to London, to St. Paul's,
To seek a chainity for souls.

A better priest I trow nowhere there is ;
He waited after no pomp nor reverence ;
He made himself no spiced conscience ;
But Christ's lore, and his apostles' twelve,
He taught ; but first he followed it himself.

Pierce Plowman has the following as an apposite picture :—

Christ's people they proudly curse
With broad book and braying bell,
To put pennies in their purse,
They will sell both heaven and hell.

But the poet was as severe upon the mendicants as was his clerical friend, as the following extract, describing one in his itinerant labors, will show :—

His wallet before him on his lap,
Brimfull of pardons come from Rome all hot ;

into the hearts of his obscure parishioners, who through his instruction had come to appreciate its worth.

It may not be improper in this place to notice a production of the reformer, which, though not published till some time later, belongs properly to the subject of this chapter.

In his mail he had a pillow-beer,
Which, as he said, was our lady's veil;
He said he had a gobbet of the sail
That St. Peter had, when that he went
Upon the sea, till Jesus Christ him hent.* (*caught.)
He had a cross of latten full of stones,
And in a glass he had pig's bones.

When folks in church had gave him what they list,
He went his way, no longer would he rest.
With scrip and tipped staff, ytucked high,
In every house he 'gan to pore and pry,
And begged meal, or cheese or else corn,—
His fellow had a staff tipped with horn,
A pair of tables all of ivory,
A pointell ypolished fetously,
And wrote always the names as he stood,
Of all folks that gave them any good,
Askaunce that he would for them pray.

* * * * *

And when he was out of the door anon,
He plained away the names every one,
That he before had written in his tables ;
He served them with nifles and with fables.

It is entitled, "How the Office of Curates is ordained of God;" and his method of showing this, is by exposing the faults of those who were unfaithful to their high trust. It consists of thirty-three sections, or heads, each presenting a charge of delinquency against unfaithful ministers. One would gladly be persuaded that the picture is over-colored; but as it consists principally of references to facts, and those of an obvious character, there is but too much cause to suspect that its truthfulness is its most painful characteristic. If but half were true, the clergy of that age were not only pests in society, but really the "angels of Satan to lead men to hell." They are declared to have been infamous for ostentation, sensuality, and avarice. They were flatterers and parasites of the great, whose vices they encouraged by their own base and servile imitation. They were buried in all the surfeitings of a worldly life; "haunted taverns out of measure, and stirred up laymen to excess, idleness, profane swearing, and disgraceful brawls." They wasted their time and wealth in gambling and revelry; went about the streets roaring and outrageous; and "sometimes had neither eye, nor tongue, nor hand, nor foot to help themselves, for drunkenness." They even glo-

ried in that which was their shame ; and were ambitious of winning, by these enormities, a reputation for “ nobleness, courtesy, goodness, freeness, and worthiness.” All this time they maintained their influence over the multitude by denouncing the vengeance of Heaven against any that should dare to question their authority ; an authority that seemed to be used for little besides the degradation of the masses, for their own worldly aggrandizement. Their doctrine was, of course, but little better than their practice. “ They taught sinful men to buy hell full dear. They shut against their people the kingdom of heaven ; and would neither go in themselves, nor suffer other men to enter.” Such is the picture of the clergy of England in the fourteenth century—a picture drawn by one who, while he was well fitted to appreciate the evils of such a state of things, most deeply bemoaned them, and labored himself, and taught others to labor, to effect a change for the better.

CHAPTER VII.—1380–81.

TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE—WAT TYLER.

THE name of Wicliff is celebrated for nothing else so much as for his effectual labors to bring the Holy Scriptures within the reach of his fellow-countrymen. In England, the reformation of the church, from a point of degradation that was reached by scarce any other national church of western Europe, was principally effected by reading the Scriptures; as in Germany the same end was attained through the personal labors of Luther; and in Switzerland by the preaching of a great number of evangelists; and at the head of the list of those through whom the Bible was given to the people of the former kingdom should always be placed the name of John de Wicliff. The history of the translation of the Scriptures, and their diffusion among the people in the vernacular, is a subject of interest, not only to the curious in matters of literature, but especially to the devout, who love to dwell upon the ways of Providence, and to contemplate the economy of divine grace.

Christianity was introduced into Britain at an early period of the history of the church,

probably during the first century, and not unlikely by the apostles themselves, or their immediate associates. But while these early Christians made free use of the word of life, there was no need of a translation, since all who read at all, did so in the language of the conquerors and religious teachers—the Latin. There is, therefore, no intimation of any attempt having been made, at any time, to give the ancient British church the Holy Scriptures in their native language.

About the middle of the fifth century that island began to be overrun by the Saxons, by whom the aboriginal inhabitants were reduced to slavery, or driven into the more inaccessible portions, and the land again relapsed into paganism. At length, through the combined agencies of the conquered Britons, the Scottish Christians and missionaries from Rome, led by St. Austin, the Saxons were brought to the profession of the Christian faith. For several centuries these Saxon Christians possessed the Scriptures only in the Latin, not because there was any objection to their appearing in the vulgar tongue, but because, as in the case of the more ancient Britons, the common people could not read at all, and the learned best understood the Latin, as a written language.

Still, though we have no account of any decided effort to give to the early Anglo-Saxon church a version of the Bible in their vernacular, it is not certain that translations of some portions of the inspired volume were not made.

The first attempt at a work of this kind, that requires our notice, is that made by Cedman, in the seventh century. He produced rather a poetic paraphrase of certain portions of Scripture history, than a translation of any part of the sacred text. Early in the next century literal translations were made of the lessons read in the stated services of the church. To about the same time two Anglo-Saxon versions of the Psalter are attributed; the one by Anhelm, bishop of Sherborne, and the other by Guthlac, the hermit. Soon after, the venerable Bede translated into the same tongue the Gospel by St. John, which seems to be the first attempt to give any consecutive portion of the New Testament to our Anglo-Saxon ancestors. In the course of the eighth and ninth centuries there were produced two or more versions of the greater part of the Bible, by interlining the Latin Vulgate with a literal Anglo-Saxon translation. At the end of one of these, which purports to have been written by two individuals, (Farmer and Owen,) the prayers of the reader

are solicited as a recompense for the favor of making the translation; a fact that shows that the making of versions into the vulgar tongue was not then prohibited, but rather that it was considered such a service as merited the gratitude of the devout reader, who should thereby receive instruction.

Alfred the Great is said to have translated the ten commandments, which he prefixed, in his own language, to his code of laws; he also made versions of some other portions of the Bible. In the latter part of the tenth century the historical books of the Old Testament were translated by Elfric, a scholar who lived in the time of the reign of Ethelred, and subscribes himself, at different periods, as monk, mass-priest, and abbot. As Elfric appears to have made this version with a view to enable his countrymen to become acquainted with the word of God for themselves, it may be reckoned the first attempt at popularizing the Holy Scriptures in that island. A few other similar attempts were made to accomplish the same end before the Norman Conquest; but in no case do we find any decided effort to bring the entire Bible within the reach of the mass of the population of England. Indeed, as before intimated, there was

but little need of such a version, as very few, except "clerks," could read at all; and they would prefer the Latin, as being more ancient, and coming nearer to the original; and also, on account of the superior honor with which that language was regarded. It is plain, however, that at that time there was no restraint laid upon making versions of the sacred writings into the language of the common people; and it is highly probable that there was then much more knowledge of the Scriptures among the people than at a somewhat later period.

After the Conquest, the language of England underwent a considerable change, and a new dialect came gradually into use, known as the Anglo-Norman; and the course of translations into that dialect began much in the same way as with the Anglo-Saxon. The first attempt, now known to have been made, was a paraphrase in verse of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, by one Orme, and hence called the *Ormulum*. Its date is somewhat uncertain, though it is generally assigned to the twelfth century. Another, and similar work, was also made, embracing, in a metrical paraphrase, the principal parts of the Old and New Testaments. It is commonly known by the title of *Salus Animæ*, or *Sowl-heal*, and its date set down to

the thirteenth century. There are also later versions of some parts of the historical books, and several, more or less intimately related to each other, of the Psalter.

The improved physical and intellectual condition of the English people, about the middle of the fourteenth century, manifested itself in nothing more strongly than in an increased desire to possess and understand the Holy Scriptures. The first attempt, during this period, at a literal translation of any portion of the Bible, was made by Richard Roll, called the hermit of Hampole, whose labors were confined to a little more than half of the book of Psalms, to which he annexed a devotional commentary. About the same time some devout clergymen produced translations of such passages from the Scriptures as were prominent in the offices of the church, and also of portions of the Gospels and the Epistles. These versions, which are of various merit, were generally guarded by a glossary or comment.

To Wicliff has generally been ascribed the honor of being the first to produce a literal translation of the whole Bible into the vernacular language of the inhabitants of England. Other claimants of this honor have indeed appeared, but not sustained by such

evidence as to establish their pretensions. Archbishop Usher assigns a translation of the whole Bible into English to the latter part of the preceding century; but others have regarded the manuscripts, to which that learned prelate assigns such an antiquity, as copies, genuine or corrected, of Wicliff's—a conclusion now generally adopted. One of Wicliff's early apologists (Dr. James) conjectures that a version of the English Scriptures existed long before the time of Wicliff; but he gives us only his conjectures, which are but poor evidence on a point so important. Dr. Adam Clarke was of opinion that a copy of the Bible in English, with interjected glosses, which he had in his possession, was of older date than the times of Wicliff; but it is probable that the evidence upon which he based his conclusions, in this case, had more weight upon his own mind than they ever have had upon that of any of his readers. There is but little doubt that his was an old copy of Wicliff's Bible. A translation of the Bible into English, a little before Wicliff's, by *John de Travisa*, vicar of Berkeley, is also sometimes spoken of as a well-attested fact in Biblical literature; but as the most diligent research has failed to discover such a work, it is concluded that his translations

were confined to a few texts, which are scattered in some parts of his works, or painted on the walls of his patron's chapel, at Berkeley Castle. But whatever may be the determination of the case in this form, it is evident, and conceded by all, that until it was done by Wicliff, no attempt was ever made to *publish* an English version of the Bible. The effort at diffusion is the peculiarity that especially and most eminently distinguishes the work of that great reformer.

His version, which was given to the public in the year 1380, was made from the Latin Vulgate, probably because he was not sufficiently skilled in the Hebrew and Greek originals to use them to advantage in such a work; these languages being then but little studied at the English universities, and very few works in them existed anywhere in western Europe. His, therefore, was only a version of a version; and when to this accumulated source of inaccuracies is added the fact, that through frequent transcribings, by unskillful hands, the Latin text had become still more incorrect than it was left by Jerome, there will appear good cause to suspect the correctness of Wicliff's Bible. These causes, however, were somewhat guarded against by the collation of many different copies of the Vulgate, and also by the

use of an old Latin Bible, written before the Vulgate was made. Though somewhat inaccurate, Wicliff's version contains clear and intelligible statements of every great doctrine of divine revelation in a good degree of purity from foreign admixtures; and, as such, is infinitely superior to any merely human composition. As a version of the emended text of the Vulgate, it is very literal—giving, in English, as nearly as the differences of the language will permit, the same sense with the Latin.

It is truly wonderful how the reformer, in the midst of his multiplied duties, the cares of his parish, his divinity lecture at Oxford, his labors as the counselor of the parliament at home, and the ambassador of his sovereign abroad, together with his voluminous writings upon the various exciting subjects that occupied his attention, could find the leisure to perform a work of such magnitude, as seems, of itself, sufficient to occupy an entire lifetime. It is not, indeed, to be presumed that he was wholly unaided in the work; there are known to have been at Oxford many firm friends of Wicliff, who were amply competent to render him any assistance in such a work, and whose love for the cause of evangelical truth would incline them to such service. There is, indeed, in one

of the manuscript copies of his Bibles, still in existence, an entry made, at the end of a portion of Baruch, which seems to indicate that part of that book had been translated by *Nicholas de Hereford*; and the known character of that scholar, as well as some others then at Oxford, renders it highly probable that the reformer found ready assistants in his valuable and learned labors. Still there is no cause to suspect the decision of posterity, which has assigned to the name of Wicliff the renown of that work; it was, doubtless, accomplished under his supervision, revised by his own hand, and put forth upon his own responsibility.

After the publication of Wicliff's Bible, which probably was done rather informally and wholly without display, by permitting it to be read and copied by any who chose to do so, the copies seem to have been multiplied with great rapidity. The manuscripts are still numerous, being found not only in the great public libraries of the British empire, but also in the collections of individuals; and all this in spite of the exterminating zeal of Papal inquisitors, by whom many hundreds of copies were committed to the flames. The effect of the sudden emission of such a flood of light was an unusual

consternation among the members of the hierarchy, whose element was darkness. A Popish canonist of that age thus vents his indignation at such an unprecedented act of audacity:—“Christ,” says Knyghton, “delivered his gospel to the clergy and doctors of the church, that they might administer to the laity and to weaker persons, according to the state of the times and wants of men. But this Master John Wicliff translated it out of the Latin into English, and thus laid it more open to the laity, and to women, who could read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy, even to those of them who had the best understanding. . . . The jewel of the church is turned into the sport of the people, and what was hitherto the principal gift of the clergy and divines, is made for ever common to the laity.” Up to this period there had been no legal provisions against the unrestrained use of the Scriptures; not that the Popish clergy were not averse to such use, but because there had not been, hitherto, any considerable danger that the laity would become too well acquainted with their Christian privileges to submit to the domination of a corrupted priesthood. But now their craft was brought into danger, and from the time of the publication of Wicliff’s Bible, the history of the Romish

Church presents a continued series of machinations to destroy the word of life.*

After this date, much of the writings of the reformer is directed to a defense of the unrestrained use of the Scripture. A few extracts must suffice, as specimens, both of his manner and matter in this controversy. In one of his earliest vindications he thus writes: "As it is certain that the truth of the Christian faith becomes more evident the more the faith itself is known, and that lord bishops condemn in the ear of secular lords what is faithful and true, on account of the person who maintains it, honest men are bound to declare the doctrine which they hold, not only in Latin, but in the vulgar tongue, that the truth may be more plainly and more widely known." In an address to the secular lords, of an older date than the above, he states, that "those heretics ought not to be heard who imagine that temporal lords should

* Some estimate of the value placed upon the Bible may be made from the known facts that they were greatly multiplied and in much demand, when the cost of one of Wicliff's New Testaments was a sum equal in value to five hundred dollars of our money, and to possess one exposed the individual to severe penalties. Surely the present generations know little of the worth of their privileges.

not possess the law of God, but that it is sufficient for them to know what may be learned from the lips of the priests and prelates." "As the faith of the church is contained in the Scriptures, the more these are known, in an orthodox sense, the better. And since secular men should assuredly understand the faith, it should be taught them in whatever language is best known to them. Inasmuch, also, as the doctrines of our faith are more clearly and precisely expressed in the Scriptures, than they may possibly be by priests, the conclusion is abundantly plain that believers should ascertain for themselves the matters of their faith, by having the Scriptures in a language which they fully understand." He proceeds further to argue for the same cause, from the fact that every person is for himself accountable to God. "It is, therefore," he adds, "necessary that all the faithful should know these goods, and the value of them; *for an answer by prelate or attorney will not then avail, but every one must then answer in his own person.*"

All Wicliff's arguments in favor of the common use of the Scriptures are built upon premises that modern Papists have learned to deny. He knew no rule of faith above, nor equal to the Bible, but rejecting all besides, his maxim

was, “The Scripture alone is truth—the Scripture alone is the faith of the church.” This has been properly styled the germ of Protestantism, and though never before formally rejected by the Popish hierarchy, it now became so directly hostile to the revealed iniquity of their system of falsehood, that its total rejection appeared necessary to its defense. Papists are opposed to the Bible, only because the Bible is opposed to them. Another striking feature of Wicliff’s doctrine, is that of the personal responsibility of every one for himself to God. It had long been taught, in effect, if not in direct terms, that religion is a work that may be safely committed to the care and management of a professional dealer in spiritual things, and that the work of securing an interest in heaven may be left to “an attorney for the soul.” The declaration of man’s personal obligations was a startling annunciation to both priests and people. It taught the people the danger of relying solely upon their spiritual practitioners for salvation, while to the clergy it was the death-knell of their *craft*. If all might consult the divine oracles, they argued, without the intervention of the priesthood—if all might be allowed to conduct the entangling traffic and mystery of their own spiritual concerns, without the

aid of a professional agent—what further demand could there be for the consecrated orders? So intimately and inseparably is the unrestrained use of the Holy Scriptures united to that form of Christian doctrine now known by the name of Protestantism, but which is as old as Christianity itself.

In the year 1381 occurred the memorable rising of the English peasantry, commonly known as Wat Tyler's insurrection. An event of so great importance would require a passing notice in a contemporaneous history, were there no other relation between that and the subject of such history than the sameness of time and place; but such notice is rendered indispensable in this case by the fact, that these popular commotions have been reckoned among the evil fruits of Wicliff's doctrines and public instructions. The history of that affair is briefly this:—The foreign wars carried on during the reign of Edward III., though they brought great glory to the English name, were attended with very heavy pecuniary expenses; which not only exercised all the ingenuity and energy of the ministers of the king to replenish the royal treasury, but also entailed a heavy debt upon it. King Richard's parliaments were not distinguished for their obsequiousness, and the com-

mons especially assumed to themselves great liberties in looking into the affairs of the kingdom. But new grants of money were needed by the crown, and, therefore, the good will of the commons could not be dispensed with. Unusual concessions were made to the demands of the lower house, and at length a poll tax was granted; a mode of contribution which reached every individual, and which fell upon each person according to his rank. But even this, for want of efficient and discreet management, failed to accomplish its intended purpose, till at length a desperate measure was resorted to, which resulted in an almost universal insurrection of the peasantry and common people of several of the principal counties in the kingdom.

Four persons were appointed, at their own instance, to make the required collections in Kent, Norfolk, and their vicinity. No doubt they were stimulated to make thorough work, by considerations of a personal character, assuring themselves that if they made due returns to the court, of greatly increased revenues, they would have but little to fear from its scrutiny into the manner in which so valuable an office was performed. The provisions of the last parliament had made all persons liable to this tax, from fifteen years old and upward; and when-

ever the age of a female became a matter of dispute, these ruffians resorted to most offensive modes of settling the question. Such insults were more than could be endured, even by the lowest orders of the commons. The proceedings of the royal taxgathers caused great agitations throughout these counties ; their progress was arrested by violence, and even the courts of justice were overawed by the multitude.

In the month of May about five thousand of the men of Essex assembled for resistance, armed with almost every variety of weapons, and led by an obscure individual, called, in the records of the times, Jack Straw. Soon after this another individual, equally obscure in his origin, but evidently a person of some parts, was placed at the head of the insurgents of Kent—the celebrated Wat Tyler. Walter was a tradesman in the town of Dartford. During his absence from home, a collector of the obnoxious tax entered his house, when a dispute arising between him and the mistress respecting the age of a young female of the family, he proceeded in the usual brutal manner to decide the difficulty. The indignation of the mother and terror of the daughter caused such an outcry that a multitude was quickly assembled, and the excited populace thrown into a state of high

exasperation. News of the affair presently reached the ears of the father in a distant part of the town, who hastened to his own dwelling, still holding in his hand the instrument of his labor. In the spirit of a man and a father, he demanded of the ruffian on what authority he had dared so to conduct himself. But the knave was inured to his business; his language became abusive; and at last he leveled a blow at the townsman. The insulted parent avoided the stroke, and at the next instant, with a single blow of his hammer, laid the agent of oppression and insult dead at his feet.

A new state of things now surrounded the tradesman of Dartford. He had suddenly and unexpectedly become a rebel and a murderer, and therefore had hope of safety only in exile or in resistance to the government; and it is not wonderful, that while he found the incensed multitude everywhere sympathizing with him in his opposition to the civil authority, he looked to that source for his safety. The population of the neighborhood quickly gathered around him, praising his conduct, and vowing to defend his person. Within a few weeks, Walter appeared in the vicinity of the capital, as the leader of an armed force, estimated at a hundred thousand.

The objects of their avowed resentment were the lords of the aristocracy, both prelates and nobles, who were regarded as the king's counselors. They bound each other by oath to be faithful to Richard and the commons, and, as though suspicious of some design on the crown, by the duke of Lancaster, and, perhaps, mindful of the indignities inflicted on the kingdom by King John, they appended to their oath, that no king should be acknowledged by the name of John. In answer to the first demand from the court, requiring them to give an account of their tumult, they asked an audience with the sovereign. Some of the royal counselors advised a compliance with that request, but Sudbury, archbishop of Canterbury, and chancellor of the realm, opposed the measure, and spoke contemptuously of the parties who had thus presumed to ask the royal notice—advice that was heard of and remembered by the insurgents. The magistrates of the metropolis would have shut their gates against them, but the multitude within shared in the same spirit of discontent, and passing London bridge, the upland multitude flowed unchecked into the city. The king and his retinue fled to the Tower for safety. For some days the insurgents had undisputed possession of the city, and though but little dis-

ciplined, were kept from excesses: they paid for all their provisions, and expressed their readiness to return home as soon as the traitors of the land should be secured and punished. Richard at length agreed to confer with their leaders at Mile End, where he granted a charter, which declared the parties assembled free, and abolished all servitude and villainage.

But while the main body of the disaffected were thus employed, a rabble, which still lingered near the Tower, suddenly collected their strength, and forced an entrance. Overpowering the knights within, they seized the archbishop, the treasurer of the realm, and Legg, who had been commissioner of the poll-tax, with several others. Reproaching them as traitors, in the madness of popular triumph they cut off their heads, and bore them on lances through the streets.

Everything now became wild and disorderly, and, for a week next ensuing, the intoxicated multitude gave themselves almost entirely to pillaging, drunkenness, and murders. Three times their demands on the government were complied with, but the tumult continued, till at Smithfield the king again met them in conference. Walter was still their nominal leader, and probably had himself become somewhat

intoxicated by success. His freedom with the king was deemed insolent by the royal attendants, and as he pressed his demand for the abolition of the royal forests and the game laws, he drew so near to the royal person as to excite suspicion of a sinister design. At this crisis the mayor of London leveled a stroke with his spear, and planted the weapon in the rebel's neck. Another of the royal retinue thrust him in the side. He rose convulsively, and struggled with desperation; but in a few minutes was no more. A general onset of the multitude seemed now inevitable; but the young king, with great presence of mind, threw himself among them, declaring that he would be their leader, and that all their demands should be granted them. The device succeeded; the fickle multitude obeyed the summons, but while engaged in this parley, were alarmed by the approach of an armed force, and fled to meet no more. The king's humanity forbade pursuit, but the concessions which had been made were all rescinded, and some hundreds of the offenders perished by the hands of the executioner.

It was intimated that this portion of the civil history of England requires the notice of the biographer of Wicliff, not only as a remarkable contemporary occurrence, but also because it has

been spoken of by some as having an intimate relation to his public life and labors. A Popish annalist of those times (Walsingham) speaks of this calamity as a clear indication of the displeasure of Heaven against the supineness of the hierarchy, in omitting to repress with due vigor the impiety of Wicliff and his followers. This intimation he strengthens, with all imaginable solemnity, by referring to the fact, that these commotions were simultaneous throughout England, and that they occurred about the time of the festival, at which the church celebrates the mystery of transubstantiation—a mystery which these heretics despise. And while he esteems Sudbury a martyr, he still thinks the manner of his death a mercifully appointed expiation for the sinful laxity of his discipline. Others, he confesses, ascribed this affliction to the prevailing wickedness of the nobles of the land; and many again traced it to the profligacy and rebellious insolence of the populace themselves. But he seems never to have dreamed that possibly a portion of the fault lay in the licentiousness and worldliness of that hierarchy which was so signally chastised by the Almighty in the person of its primate. Another, and more modern Popish writer, (Lingard,) confidently attributes these popular ex-

citements to the notions of Wicliff and his followers respecting the right of property, and the effect of mortal sin in a ruler upon the allegiance of subjects,—an assumption, to say the least, that is wholly gratuitous.

The friends of the reformer have entered the lists against his Popish accusers, and must be acknowledged to have succeeded in making a clear case in his defense. It is shown that similar popular commotions have often occurred, where it is impossible to trace them to such a cause; that in the same age the disbanded mercenaries, and afterward the peasantry, of France ravaged large portions of that kingdom for many successive years. At this time, the commons of both England and France were rising from the degradation of the lowest vassalage to a state in which they could challenge and exercise some of the few natural rights of which they had long been deprived,—and as usual, such claims could not be asserted without commotion and bloodshedding. It is to such men as Wat Tyler that Providence assigns the business of breaking the dead quiet of despotism, and asserting before the mighty, that common people have rights, and that they will declare and maintain them.

Papists are certainly the last people that should charge upon their opponents a tendency

to popular disorders. Every person at all acquainted with the history of the “dark ages,” when the reign of Popery was almost wholly undisturbed by the breath of dissent, knows that then especially were such commotions of fearfully frequent occurrence. Those storms of passion, like the commotions of old chaos before the brooding Spirit gave it direction and endowed it with order, tended to no salutary result; a particular by which they are especially distinguished from the sanative fermentations that follow the diffusion of light and truth among the masses of the people. The crusades themselves were little better than ill-organized rabbles, which fanaticism—happily for the countries where they originated—drove forth to perish in deserts or to fall by the cimiters of the Mussulman. At an earlier period the French populace made an insurrection resembling in most of its features that of the English under Wat Tyler, and doomed like it after a partial success to an entire overthrow; but so far was this from taking its rise in a spirit opposed to the hierarchy, that it was really a religious, or rather a fanatical, movement. Their leader professed to have been commissioned by the Virgin in a vision, and all who engaged in the insurrection were faithful in their attachment to the Papacy. At

another time an extensive and terrible ferment broke out in Flanders, and spread thence over the greater part of France. Here again a leader was found who boasted a commission from the Virgin, and the emblem on their banners was the cross and a lamb. The multitudes swelled to a hundred thousand, including some from the highest orders of society, and every form of abomination was committed by them under the name of religion. Seventy years afterward an insurrection broke out almost exactly parallel to this, whose short career was distinguished by a general massacre of the Jews. With such examples before them, Popish authors should be careful how they lay hold of a contemporaneous tumult, and endeavor to turn it to the discredit of a peaceable and loyal preacher of the gospel of Christ.

Apart from all causes properly religious, or even theological, there was abundant cause to rouse the prostrate energies of the populace, and to goad them to rebellion. The English nation had long staggered under the despotism of the civil government, and the more degrading and exacting despotism of the hierarchy, like "a strong ass bowing down between two burdens;" and therefore a sufficient reason is given in the report of the committee of the House of

Commons, appointed to investigate the matter. "To speak the real truth," says that report, "the *injuries* lately done to the poorer commons, *more than they ever suffered before*, caused them to rise and to commit the mischief done in their late riot."

Still it is not altogether improbable, that the influence of Wicliff's teachings had some indirect effect in rendering the people impatient of the burdens laid upon them. Christianity teaches men to esteem themselves as men, and by elevating the character, unfits it for the degrading yoke of either civil or religious tyranny; so by the preaching and propagation of a purer faith, the throne of oppression is undermined and overthrown. It is thus that Christ, wherever his gospel is preached, does literally, as well as spiritually, "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;" and should it be made to appear that, in this indirect way, Wicliff was the cause of Wat Tyler's insurrection, another chaplet of honors would adorn his brow.

CHAPTER VIII.—1381-82.

THE SACRAMENTAL CONTROVERSY.

In pursuing the history of our reformer, it becomes necessary at this period of his life to contemplate him in new and somewhat more difficult circumstances than any through which he had passed. Though, from the beginning of his career, he had been called to contend with “wickedness in high places,” yet he had had, in every time of trial, the countenance and support of some of the great. The secular clergy and the university sustained him in his contests with the mendicants, because he then acted as the advocate of their rights and privileges; the crown supported him, when he asserted the prerogatives of the civil magistrate against the usurpations of the hierarchy; and the people gave him their countenance, while he labored to lighten their burdens, and to free them from the intolerable exactions of their spiritual oppressors. While his attacks were directed against obvious abuses and gross immoralities, he would be sustained by the multitudes who felt and saw the evils complained of. But in the contest in which he now engaged he could calculate upon but

little of that kind of sympathy and support. It is evident from this affair that Wicliff as a reformer was not the mere creature of the circumstances that surrounded him, but rather that he followed his convictions of right, without respect to the convenience or inconvenience that might flow from such a course of action. He cared for the truths of the gospel, and the spiritual interests of men, and could not tolerate the subtil perversions of truth by which the ignorant and unwary were led onward in the ways of sin to their eternal ruin; and therefore he was prepared, at any hazard, to oppose such doctrines.

Few subjects have been more violently debated, or have been made the occasion of so much uncharitable action, in the nominal church of Christ, as the question of the sacrament of the eucharist. In the church of the first three centuries these differences and difficulties were unknown, for then the ministers of religion were content to occupy the places assigned them by the great Head of the church, without arrogating to themselves spiritual lordship; and consequently they had little occasion to seek to invest their ministrations with the magic powers of charms, or to seek out other ways of salvation than the doctrines of the cross of Christ. The manner in which Christ is

received in the holy communion was an open question even in the Romish Church until the eleventh century. Before that time, however, there had been a manifest and very strong tendency to invest this sacrament with a mysterious and supernatural character; but that dogma grew up rather under the shadow of ecclesiastical usage, and by indirect teaching, than from any open and systematic effort to impose it upon the church.

The Anglo-Saxon church never received the dogma of transubstantiation, though that body is known to have been greatly influenced by the feelings and wishes of the Papacy; nor is it improbable that a portion of her clergy, immediately prior to the Norman Conquest, both knew and approved of that doctrine. At that period, however, it had become a subject of violent debate in the church, but remained yet undecided. About the beginning of the eleventh century Leutheric, a French prelate, affirmed, in opposition to the prevailing opinions of the times, that none but real believers received the body of Christ in the holy sacrament. About forty years later the same views were more strongly insisted upon by Berenger, archbishop of Angiers, a man renowned for his acute genius, extensive learning, and exemplary sanctity of

life,—though evidently not equally distinguished for firmness. A violent and protracted controversy ensued, which terminated in affirming the doctrine of transubstantiation by the highest authority of the Papacy and of the whole Romish Church,—a controversy in which the principal place was given to Lanfranc, whom William the Norman had made archbishop of Canterbury. Thus suddenly was a dogma, hitherto foreign to the English Church, adopted not only in common with all the Roman Catholic Church, but in an especial sense by the clergy of the Anglo-Norman hierarchy; and from that period to the age of Wicliff the doctrine of “the real presence” was taught by the native clergy without any visible opposition.

Of the process by which the mind of the reformer became freed from the entanglements of Romish delusions upon this point we have no definite information. It is plain, however, that he had long devoted himself to a careful study of the Bible, and had taken its inspired instructions as the rule of his faith; and while we have this knowledge we need not be at a loss to account for the origin of his views respecting transubstantiation. Still he appears not to have attained his corrected notions without a painful struggle in his own spirit, nor to

have entered upon the work of teaching the convictions of his heart, without a most solemn sense of responsibility to God. The absurdity of the doctrine against which he arrayed himself would have justified a firm opposition to it ; but he regarded that of much less importance than its impiety, and dangerous tendency to a deceitful form of gross idolatry.

The period at which Wicliff began to inveigh against the tenet in question is not certainly ascertained, but probably he taught a different doctrine respecting the eucharist from the time of his settlement at Lutterworth. In his divinity lectures, delivered in the spring of the year 1381, a decided prominence was given to that discussion. About that time he published twelve conclusions, calling the attention of the members of the university to his exposition of this sacrament ;—in which, while admitting that the words of consecration conferred a peculiar, and even a mysterious dignity on the bread and wine, he most distinctly stated that those elements were not to be considered “as Christ, nor as any part of him, but as an effectual sign of him.” His moderation, which led him to stop short of some things that Scripture authority would have warranted, should excite our admiration rather than censure. He venerated the church even in its

lapsed state; and repudiated its conclusions only when he felt the clear and irresistible truths of the word of God impelling him to do so.

It will be readily supposed, that a tenet which was made so much to subserve the selfish interests of the priesthood could not be thus assailed without exciting the most decided opposition. The greater part of the honors of the university were then possessed by Wicliff's old enemies, the members of the religious orders, and to these was now joined the chancellor,—William de Berton,—in measures designed to prevent the diffusion of the new doctrine. In a convention of twelve doctors, eight of whom were either monks or mendicants, the reformer was represented as teaching, that in the sacrament of the altar the substance of material bread and wine remained without change after the words of consecration were pronounced; and that in the same venerable sacrament there is the body and blood of Christ, not essentially, nor substantially, nor even bodily, but figuratively and tropically—so that Christ is not there truly, or verily in his own bodily presence. On the other hand these doctors declare it to be the true doctrine of the church, "that by the sacramental words, duly pronounced by the priest, the bread and wine upon the altar are transubstantiated, or

substantially converted into the true body and blood of Christ—so that after consecration there is not in that venerable sacrament the material bread and wine which before existed, considered in their own substances or natures, but only the species [outward appearances] of the same, under which are contained the true body of Christ, and his blood, not figuratively, nor tropically, but essentially, substantially, and corporeally—so that Christ is verily there in his own proper bodily presence.” Dogmas so repugnant to common sense were of course considered unfit for discussion and inquiry; and therefore it was resolved that the heaviest penalties of the church, together with suspension from all scholastic exercises, and the forfeiture of personal liberty, should be incurred by any member of the university who should inculcate, or listen to, any defense of the opinions published by Wicliff.

The first intimation that Wicliff received of these proceedings was from a messenger who entered his room while he was engaged in lecturing on this very subject; and in the name of the chancellor, and of the divines, his coadjutors pronounced the above sentence. On receiving this communication, the reformer paused for a moment, then rose, and, after complaining of

this substitution of brute force in the place of reason, challenged the collected strength of his opponents to a fair refutation of his published opinions. But they were too well aware that reason was against them, to change the ground of controversy from the tyranny of power to the arena of debate. They dreaded nothing so much as discussion, and, therefore, were not prepared to accept the challenge of one whose force of reasoning and skill in debate were celebrated throughout the kingdom. But though they dared not to venture upon a defense of the grounds of their decision against the reformer, they pertinaciously held him fast in the grasp of their arbitrary determinations. The only alternative placed before him was silence or imprisonment; and as he was determined, if possible, to escape from both, he appealed for protection to the civil power. *They* were looking to that power to crush opinion and investigation; *he* would look to it for an opposite purpose.

It was at this trying juncture that Wicliff experienced the uncertainty of the favor and support of the great and worldly minded. The duke of Lancaster had been his friend and patron in all his former contests with his enemies; but no sooner was he informed of the

new difficulties of his friend, and the position he had assumed, than he posted away to Oxford to persuade him to speak no further on this matter—which service rendered by his lordship has been received as a full atonement for his former delinquencies, and has gained him the title of a “sage counselor and faithful son of the church.” Wicliff, however, was not to be thus intimidated, for he confided less in the power of his allies than in the goodness of his cause.

The time of the meeting of the next parliament was then somewhat distant; and during the interval the decision of the chancellor and the doctors would be only partially operative. His oral lectures were alone subject to their surveillance. As rector of Lutterworth, he was wholly independent of them; nor had they any right to call him in question for anything that he might publish in writing. Of his course with regard to his lectures, we are not informed—probably they were directed less to exciting subjects; but we have substantial evidence that his pen was not unemployed. It was during this crisis that he composed a tract, called “The Wicket; or, a Definition of the Words, *Hoc est meum corpus*,” (this is my body.) In this little tract he made a vigorous

attack upon the prevailing doctrine respecting the manner of Christ's presence in the eucharist, sharply condemning the absurdity, impiety, and blasphemy of pretending that, in the act of consecration, the bread and wine become the veritable "body and blood, soul and divinity," of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its temper, notwithstanding the peculiarly irritating circumstances in which the author was placed, is moderate ; and its tone such as to impress the reader with the conviction, that he wrote under a solemn sense of religious obligations. The philosophical absurdity of distinguishing, as a matter of fact, between the essence and the sensible properties of matter, he passes over rather briefly, but plainly shows the force of its bearing against the received doctrine. The impiety and absurdity of a doctrine which teaches that a man may make God, and a creature may create his Creator, are next animadverted upon, and the pernicious consequences flowing from it pointed out. These, no doubt, were among the strong motives for maintaining this strange doctrine ; for if it could but be made to appear that the clergy were clothed with such a transcendent power, it would readily follow that they ought not to be subject to any secular authority. And not only would this elevate the priesthood

above the magistracy, but also above Christ himself; for so “would Christ be bound to honor with filial reverence the priests who thus become the creators and fathers of himself.” Among other absurdities, it was pretended that each portion of the sacramental bread became the undivided body of Christ; a supposition which was attempted to be illustrated by a glass, broken into a multitude of fragments, each of which would still reflect the same countenance. This illustration the reformer turned against the doctrine it was intended to support; for, said he, as the glass presents only an image, or representation of a face, and not the face itself, so each portion of the broken bread may represent the broken body of Christ, but can do no more. Again he asks, since Christ expressly said, “I am the vine,” why they do not worship the vine; and adds, that to identify the bread with Christ’s body is to imitate the irrational misconceptions of the Jews, who perverted Christ’s words by taking them literally, when he said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up again in three days.” It will be seen, by a perusal of this short treatise, that Wicliff had at that time almost wholly disentangled his mind from the devious mazes of the great Papal heresy in re-

lation to the holy eucharist, and that many of the principal arguments by which it has been assailed and put to shame were familiar to his mind. The closing sentence is worthy of the man and of the cause in which he was engaged. It is as follows:—"Now, therefore, pray we heartily to God that this evil time may be made short for the chosen men, as he hath promised in his blessed gospel; and that the large and broad way that leadeth to perdition may be stopped; and the strait and narrow way that leadeth to bliss may be made open by the Holy Scriptures, that we may know which is the will of God, to serve him in truth and holiness in the dread of God, that we may find by him a way of bliss everlasting. So be it."

In the preceding chapter it was stated that Sudbury, the archbishop of Canterbury, fell a victim to the infuriated populace at the time of the insurrection of the commons. He was succeeded in the primacy by Courtney, the late bishop of London, a prelate equally distinguished for enmity to Wicliff and his subserviency to the Papacy. No sooner was he invested with his new and enlarged authority, than he avowed his determination to employ it all in extirpating the opinions of the reformer, which

hitherto had proved to be too powerfully protected to be overcome by him.

Two days after the receipt of his canonical investiture, (early in May, 1382,) a parliament convened at Westminster. The new primate immediately issued his mandates, calling a synod to deliberate on the measures proper to be adopted relative to certain strange and dangerous opinions, said to be widely diffused "as well among the nobility as the commons of this realm of England." Accordingly, on the 17th of the same month, an assembly—including eight prelates, fourteen doctors of laws, six bachelors of divinity, fifteen mendicants, and four monks—was convened at a residence of the Gray Friars, in the metropolis. The policy of the primate seems to have been to procure a formal condemnation of the hated tenets, and then to commence an unsparing persecution of all who would not renounce them. It so happened, that just as the synod was approaching the grave subjects that demanded their attention, the city was convulsed by an earthquake. This was considered by some of the assembled inquisitors as an indication of the displeasure of Heaven against their proceedings; and it was not without some difficulty that the archbishop was able to keep the assembly to its

purposes. But his resources proved equal to the emergency ; for, by a skillful turning of the subject, the incident that had threatened to defeat the end of the convention was made to promote it with increased determination. He assured his wavering associates, that as these commotions of the earth were caused by the expulsion of noxious vapors, it was plainly a favorable intimation that the present agitations of the church would be succeeded by purity and quiet, if the rebellious spirits that troubled her should be cast out. The failing courage of the assembly being thus effectually rallied, they addressed themselves to their inquisitorial duties. Twenty-four conclusions were then produced, which, it was said, had been preached generally and publicly among nobles and commons of the realm of England ; and after three days' deliberation, ten of them were condemned as heretical and fourteen as erroneous.

The conclusions condemned as heretical affirmed, that in the sacrament of the eucharist no change takes place in the substance of the elements ; that ecclesiastics forfeit their power as such by falling into deadly sin ; that confession to a priest is unnecessary ; that clerical endowments are unlawful ; and that a depraved pontiff has not a right to his authority from the

gospel, though he may have from the edicts of the emperor. In the conclusions condemned as erroneous, the reformer is made to state,—that for a prelate to excommunicate any one, without knowing him to be excommunicated by God, is to incur the guilt of heresy and the pains of excommunication himself; and that to prohibit appeals from ecclesiastical tribunals to the king, is to be guilty of treason; that the license of the pope or the bishop is not necessary to make it lawful to preach the gospel; and that to neglect this duty for fear of the censure of the hierarchy, is sin against God; that tithes are to be viewed as alms, and that temporal lords may deprive a delinquent church of her endowments; that to give alms to friars is itself sinful, as the religious orders are themselves corrupt institutions, and tend, in many ways, to the injury of piety. These are the doctrines attributed to Wicliff by his adversaries, who, doubtless, gave to them all the coloring they would bear, that they might appear both new and strange to all who should, through them, come to a knowledge of those doctrines. Still, the friends of the reformer have but little cause to complain of the charges thus brought against him, as his “heresy” and “erroneous tenets” are such as they will ac-

count his chief honors. As these doctrines will come up for review in another chapter, they may now be passed over with a simple commendation, as worthy of our attention, and as being, when expressed, as probably Wicliiff himself expressed them, very near to the truth of the gospel.

The archbishop was fully aware that the persecuted heresy was not confined to the university, but that the metropolis itself was full of it. He therefore addressed a letter to his successor in the see of London, in which he laments, that, in contempt of canons to the contrary, many persons were preaching without the sanction of the holy see, or of the prelates, and were also teaching doctrines subversive of the whole church, “infecting many well-meaning Christians, and causing them to wander grievously from the Catholic communion, *without which there is no salvation.*” The bishop is then reminded of the high authority by which these doctrines had been condemned, and therefore he is exhorted, in common with his brethren, the bishops within the province of Canterbury, “to admonish and warn, that no man do henceforth hold, preach, or defend the foresaid heresies, and errors, or any of them.” And to secure this most effectually, he requires

the prelates to admit no suspected person to the liberty of preaching—to listen to no abettors of these pernicious tenets—to lean to them neither publicly nor privately, but to shun them as pestilent and poisonous serpents—and that they do this on pain of the greater excommunication.

The bishop of Lincoln, Wicliff's diocesan, was not only addressed, in common with his brethren, in the above-named letter, but through him letters were forwarded both to the abbots and priors, and also to all the clergy and ecclesiastical functionaries throughout the arch-deanery of Leicester, within which the rectory of Lutterworth was situated, charging them with the execution of the late decrees against heresy; it is probable, therefore, that one of these paternal missiles was addressed to the reformer himself. A similar letter was forwarded by the archbishop to a Carmelite and doctor of divinity at Oxford, who had distinguished himself by opposition to the views of Wicliff, requiring him to publish the decrees of the synod in the university. And to give the greater effect to this grand crusade of the new primate against heresy, it was arranged that during the ensuing Whitsuntide a grand procession should be performed through the streets of London to St. Paul's: and accord-

ingly, on the appointed day, a bare-footed throng passed to the cathedral, where a Carmelite friar ascended the pulpit, and harangued the multitude on their duty to the church and her enemies, at this foreboding crisis.

At Oxford, however, a stronger opposition to the designs of the primate was to be encountered than the process of the former year against Wicliff seemed to promise. William de Berton, the former chancellor, had been succeeded by Robert Rigge, a friend and doctrinal disciple of the reformer. Among the most famous divines then at Oxford was Dr. Nicholas Hereford, well known as a friend of Wicliff, and declared by the primate, even before the late synod, to be "vehemently suspected of heresy." But while the inquisitorial purposes of the archbishop were in progress, Hereford was called by the chancellor to preach before the university—a high mark of distinction and favor. A similar mark of approbation was about the same time shown to another of Wicliff's admirers, Ralph Rappington, who was also a doctor of divinity. Both these performances are said to have been passionate eulogies of the character and doctrines of the reformer. This course of the chancellor called forth an expostulatory letter from the archbishop,

advising him to a more dutiful course, and requiring him to "loathe the opinions and intercourse of these presumptuous men," and to give his aid to the due publication of the letter sent to Oxford by the Carmelite friar, that the reign of a sect, against which the king and the lords had promised to unite their authority, might at length be brought to a close.

The affairs of the kingdom were at this time highly unfavorable to the efforts and purposes of the friends of ecclesiastical reform. Richard was now in the sixteenth year of his age. With his crown he had inherited a large portion of political disquietude and embarrassment, which had matured into rebellion and the prostration of the affairs of the government. But while the king felt the difficulty of his circumstances, arising especially from the insubordination of the commons, and the exhaustion of the treasury, he was promised the countenance and support of the hierarchy, and heard the insinuation, that the worst results might be expected, should the rector of Lutterworth, and his numerous disciples, be allowed to continue their appeals to the passions of the populace. To propitiate the clergy became a point of great moment with the young king, as both their influence and their wealth were required to

sustain the distracted affairs of the kingdom. The duke of Lancaster had himself fallen from the height of his power, and was become far from acceptable to either the people or the ministry, and even this broken reed was now taken away from the reformer, by his refusal to sustain him in his controversy respecting the sacrament. Add to all these, the fact that the newly appointed primate, who had set himself up as general inquisitor of heresy, was of a family possessed of no inconsiderable influence with a large body of the nobility of the age—and there appears an array of most unfavorable circumstances opposing the progress of the cause of reformation. And so strongly were these causes developed, that though the king, at his next parliament, proposed some mitigation of the grievances of the people, and the house of commons declared that the late insurrection was wholly chargeable on the government, yet the existing difficulties were laid hold of and used for little else than occasions for tyranny and oppression.

It was at such a time, and among circumstances so auspicious to their cause, that the clergy united in presenting to the king and parliament a complaint against the doctrines and practices of the disciples of Wicliff. To

render them odious, and expose them to contempt, they now received from their enemies the name of Lollards—by which designation certain sectaries on the continent had long been known, and to whom almost everything degrading had been imputed. The doctrines of this injured people, as stated by their chief enemies, the clergy—but which, probably, were truly stated in most of their substantial parts—were chiefly these: that there has been no true pope since the time of Sylvester; that the power of granting indulgences, and of binding and loosing, as claimed by ecclesiastics, is a delusion; that auricular confession is a superfluous service; that the bishop of Rome has no legislative authority in the Christian church; that the invocation of saints is an unauthorized custom; that the worship of images and pictures is idolatry, and that the miracles attributed to them are false; that the clergy are bound to reside in their benefices, and not farm them out to others; and, finally, that the pomp of the higher orders of the priesthood should be done away, and their doctrine as to the vanity of the world be enforced by example. Though such tenets may appear to us to be not only harmless, but commendable, they could not fail to be highly offensive to those whose preten-

sions they so explicitly condemned. By their appeal to the king, the clergy obtained his sanction, and that of certain lords, to a statute providing for the punishment of heresy—the first of the kind that ever disgraced the statute books of England. By this document, though surreptitiously obtained, and, therefore, invalid in point of law, much was done toward rendering the magistrates the instruments and drudges of an inquisitorial priesthood—which character the clergy now generally assumed. To give efficiency to the whole machinery of persecution, the force at the command of the sheriffs was to be subject, in every place, and at every season, to the bidding of the prelates; and the only hope of the parties accused was their ability to “justify themselves according to the law, and the reason of holy church,” another form of expressing the persecutor’s alternative, “turn or burn.” It should here be noticed, that this first persecuting statute, known in the realm of England, was obtained by fraud on the part of the clergy, without either the consent or knowledge of the mass of the lay representatives of the people, or of the temporal lords; and it should be remembered that the laity were indebted to the clergy for the persuasions of the dungeon and the stake; and no doubt the zeal

that first taught them to prize the scent of blood, long propelled them in the chase. Persecution is the offspring of priestly malice and jealousy, rather than of the untaught depravity of the human heart, and had not priests and pontiffs been their counselors, magistrates would seldom have made religious opinion “a crime to be punished by the judges.”

CHAPTER IX.—1382-84.

WICLIFF BANISHED FROM OXFORD.

WE have seen, in the preceding chapter, the means adopted by the primate of the English Church for accomplishing his purposes upon his opponents, and for establishing what he conceived to be doctrinal orthodoxy; we are now to follow him in the execution of his diabolical purposes. No sooner did he find himself armed with his formidable, but ill-gotten power, than, assuming the title of inquisitor of heretical pravity, he directed his attention to the extirpation of heresy from the university of Oxford. The sessions of the inquisitorial synod at the Gray Friars were accordingly resumed. Robert Rigge, the chancellor of the

university, and William Brightwell, a doctor of divinity, were first called to answer respecting their late conduct in favor of Hereford and Rippington, as well as for their own opinions concerning the condemned conclusions. It was a matter of some importance with the archbishop and his party to detach the principal persons about the university from the interests of the reformer and his more attached friends ; and, therefore, all the arts of terror and persuasion were brought to bear upon the chancellor and his companion in the present accusation ; and to that degree were they successful, that the accused so far yielded as to assent to the condemnation of the obnoxious articles, and, in return, received the benediction of the church. The sincerity of the chancellor's attachment to the cause of the hierarchy against the reformer was then put to the test by the archbishop, who gave written instructions to "his well-beloved son in Christ, the chancellor of Oxford," requiring him to publish the decrees of the late synod against the proscribed articles, in the schools and churches, at the hours of lecturing and preaching ; and also to discourage and suppress all attendance upon the preaching of certain persons, who were notorious for heresy—among whom he named John Wicliff, Nicholas Here-

ford, Philip Rippington, John Ashton, and Lawrence Redman. But the soundness of the chancellor's conversion from his former inclination to "heretical pravity" seems not to have been sufficiently attested to satisfy the primate; for he at the same time reiterated his injunction to that dignitary, to abstain from all interference with the proceedings of those divines who had been appointed to inquire and report respecting the religious state of Oxford.

Other sessions of the synod at the Gray Friars were held at various times during the months of May and June, 1382, at which the above-named suspected persons, except Wicliff himself, were called to account for their delinquencies, and their cases variously disposed of. Wicliff, however, remained unmolested, and continued to lift up his voice against the corrupt and persecuting hierarchy, and to occupy his pen in composing those treatises in favor of reform, which still remain as monuments of his zeal, courage, and untiring industry. Why the reformer was left to his own way, while his less obnoxious disciples were made to feel the strong hand of the ecclesiastical power, is not well known; perhaps, however, since he had appealed to the king, it was thought that it might appear disrespectful wholly to disregard it, and it may

be that he was still so far favored by certain noble lords, that the archbishop, not unmindful of a conflict with Lancaster at St. Paul's, chose not again to come into contact with such turbulent and fiery spirits. For whatever cause he may have been left to enjoy his liberty, he was careful to employ it to good purpose, and so continued to declaim against these attempts to summon the powers of the state to aid the church in its work of proscription and persecution. The special vigilance and energy of the inquisitorial power were directed against Hereford and Ashton, the former a collaborer with Wicliff in the translation of the Scriptures, and the author of several tracts, designed to promote the cause of reform ; and the latter an itinerant preacher of eminent qualifications and great efficiency in his calling. While these processes were pending, Wicliff speaks of them in his parochial expositions. The persecution is attributed principally to the zeal of Courtney, whom he styles "the great bishop of England," and describes as deeply incensed "because God's law is written in English to lewd men." "He pursueth a certain priest," continues the preacher, "because he writeth to men this English, and summoneth him, and traveleth him so that it is hard for him to bear it. And thus he

pursueth another priest, by the help of Pharisees, because he preacheth Christ's gospel freely, and without fables." He then exhorts his hearers to pray that the cause of antichrist may not prevail in these times of perils foretold by Christ and St. Paul.

In another of his discourses Wicliff alludes more devoutly, and even sorrowfully, to these attempts of the priesthood to suppress the truth and power of the gospel. He is speaking of the burial of Christ, and the vain attempts of the priests to prevent his resurrection; which desperate efforts he produces as illustrations of the attempts of the prelates to suppress the revival of the gospel of Christ. "Even thus," he exclaims, "do our high priests, lest God's law, after all they have done, should be *quickened*. Therefore make thy statutes strong as a rock; and they obtain grace of knights to confirm them; and this they well mark with the witness of lords, and all lest the truth of God's law, hid in the sepulchre, should break out to the knowing of the common people. O Christ! thy law is hidden thus; when wilt thou send thy angel to remove the stone, and show thy truth unto thy flock? Well I know that knights have taken gold in this case, to help that thy law may be thus hid. and thy ordinances con-

sumed; but well I know that, in the day of doom, it shall be manifest, and even before, when thou ariseth against all thy enemies."

In conformity with his declared purpose, in the following November, (1382,) Wicliff presented his complaint to the king and parliament. At this time he availed himself of the opportunity thus given to state and defend his doctrine, not only as regards the single point of the eucharist, but all for which he had been at any time censured. Four principal subjects are therein presented: the first declares that monastic, and all similar religious vows and discipline, are human devices, and of no obligation; the second, that temporal lords may lawfully take away the temporal goods of the church; the third, that tithes are voluntary offerings, and should be withheld from churchmen of notoriously and scandalously vicious lives; and, in the last, he only prays that the doctrine of the eucharist, "which is plainly taught of Christ and his apostles in the Gospels and Epistles, might be also openly taught in the churches." These articles were argued at some length, especially that relating to the religious orders, and with a good degree of clearness, by the appellant.

The impression made on the parliament by

this appeal was considerable, and to Wycliff must have been highly gratifying. In a petition to the king, the house of commons cited those provisions of the spurious statute obtained by the primate, which rendered every sheriff in the kingdom the tool of his diocesan, requiring him to root out by the sword the errors which neither the persuasions nor the terrors of an infallible church had been sufficient to destroy. They also require, since this pretended law "was never agreed to or granted by the commons, but whatsoever was moved therein was without their assent, that the said statute be disannulled," as it was "in nowise their meaning that either themselves or such as shall succeed them, shall be further bound to the prelates, than were their ancestors in former times." But it was less difficult to procure legal enactments looking to a redress of grievances than to secure their proper execution. Through the iniquitous use of the pretended dispensing power of the court of Rome, bad faith had become the ordinary rule of action among the courts of Christendom; and promises, though confirmed by oaths, were of little value unless the party in whose behalf they were made possessed the power to enforce their observance. Courtney was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Papacy, and

doubtless it is to him that the English nation is now indebted for that precious memorial of spiritual tyranny still found upon her statute book, which was at first fraudulently placed there, and afterward, when formally repealed, was left upon the record, while the annulling ordinance was excluded.

But the archbishop was not to be discouraged by the apparent want of favor shown by the parliament to his course of proceedings. Simultaneous with the parliament a convocation was assembled at Oxford, when the clergy were informed by the primate, that the business before them was to grant a subsidy to the crown, and to remedy certain disorders which had long disgraced the university, and were rapidly extending to the whole community. The blow that had so long been suspended over the rector of Lutterworth was now about to descend upon his head with all the concentrated powers of the hierarchy. He was therefore summoned to answer before the convocation, on the articles set forth as containing his opinions. His recent appeal to the secular power, and the favorable reception his complaint had met with, somewhat embarrassed the haughty prelate, who cautiously avoided a collision with the civil authority. Leaving the more offensive points of the mutual

limits of powers and prerogatives between the church and the state, the more properly theological, as well as more abstruse doctrine of the sacrament was brought under investigation. John of Gaunt, whom we have already seen attempting to dissuade Wicliiff from entering upon this subtil subject, now openly deserted him; but he had already advanced too far to allow him now to retreat except at the expense of consistency and a good conscience, and therefore though, like St. Paul, "he stood alone," yet like the same great apostle he was unmoved. According to the statements of his enemies themselves, the reformer produced before this grave assembly "a confession containing substantially all his former errors; and, like an incorrigible heretic, refuted all the doctors of the second millenary, on the question of the sacrament of the altar."

This point in the reformer's history may be considered as the most truly sublime that anywhere occurs. The assembly before which he was called in question was scarcely second in dignity to any in the kingdom, comprising the whole body of the prelacy with the primate at their head, assisted by many of the inferior clergy, the chancellor of the university, and a numerous selection of doctors. Around these were col-

lected an interested crowd of laymen, as spectators of the scene, each agitated with deep solicitude as to the issue of the proceedings. Before this array of authority and learning, all combined to effect his ruin, stood alone and unsupported the manly form of the rector of Lutterworth, venerable with the silvery marks of premature age, and wasted by overtired mental activity. For more than forty years he had resided at Oxford, and all the associations of an eventful life clustered around that ancient seat of learning. He had always been foremost to defend its independence of foreign control, and especially that of the Papacy. The place of his present arraignment had often been made vocal with his praise, uttered by admiring converts to the truths he taught, or by his own voice raised in defense of the pure doctrines of the gospel. But though his disciples were still numerous and powerful, in this the hour of his extremity all seem to have forsaken him, and the reformer, after the example of his Master, came alone to be judged by a corrupt and despotic priesthood. But though alone, he was still firmly fixed in his purpose, and, as we have seen, was more than a match for all that opposed him in his defense of the truth ; for though possessed of the brute force requisite to silence discussion,

they could not meet the truth and contend with it on equal grounds. To this dignified synod Wicliff presented a confession of his faith with arguments defensive of his views upon disputed points. This was written in Latin, and being addressed to scholars, it has much of the scholastic forms of argumentation, being in some degree subtil, puerile, and prolix. Yet despite of these blemishes, (which were then esteemed its excellences,) the confession is a piece of very considerable merit, containing the chief points of the doctrines of the gospel, set forth with a forcible clearness rarely to be equaled among the compositions of the fourteenth century. This confession was accompanied by another, which was rather a transcript of the first, in which the same leading positions are assumed and the same conclusions arrived at; but being intended for the use of the laity rather than of the synod, it was written in English, and almost entirely divested of the scholastic dress of the Latin copy. In his Latin confession, Wicliff applies himself to demonstrate, and in the dialect of the schools, "that this venerable sacrament is *naturally* bread and wine, but *sacramentally* the body and blood of Christ." He proceeds to substantiate his position by observing that there are *six* modes of existing that may be attributed

to the body of the Saviour ; and that *three* of these may be affirmed of that body as it is present in the eucharist, and *three* of its state in the heavenly world. In the eucharist he is *virtually, spiritually, and sacramentally* present, but his *substantial*, his *corporeal*, and his *dimensional* presence, pertains exclusively to the celestial state. He then recites at large the doctrines maintained by himself and followers,—denies the charge of adoring the elements of bread and wine, and charges his opponents with a misconstruction of the meaning of the fathers, when, in citing their language, they confound the notion of a sacramental with that of an identical presence. The result of this mistake is affirmed to be, the insane fiction of an accident or quality without a subject.—a tenet equally insulting to the church and injurious to God.

This confession was looked upon by the synod as a substantial, though guarded reiteration of his former errors, and as an attempt to justify them by proofs and arguments ; and that his effort was not an entire failure is evident from the declaration of the Popish chronicler, that like an incorrigible heretic he refuted all the doctors of the second millenary, (since the year 1000,) affirming that, with the exception of Berenger, they were all involved in error. That

this was the impression made by the reformer's confession is further evident from the course subsequently pursued by both of the contending parties in the issue. In his English confession, which, as it accompanied the other, was doubtless intended to give a substantial version of it, he affirms that the sacrament of the altar is *very God's body*, in the form of bread; and that if it be broken into three parts, or into a thousand, every one of these is the same *God's body*: and, he continues, it is heresy to believe that this sacrament is God's body and no bread; since in truth *it is both together*; in its *own nature*, it is very bread; but *sacramentally*, it is the body of Christ. He then reminded his judges of the earthquake which occurred at the time of the synod at the Gray Friars, in London, as a testimony of God's anger at the heresies there maintained. Yet another Popish writer of that age affirmed that on this occasion Wicliff displayed timidity, and attempted to disclaim his errors, and to propitiate his judges by cringing and base compliance,—a statement so effectually disproved by the documents above-noticed that no further denial would be necessary were it not that, with a still more unaccountable fatuity, certain more recent writers, whose professed favor to the opinions and character of the re-

former give weight to their concessions, have seemed to consider this affair as strangely prejudicial to his fame. But until some further proof is adduced than the *ex parte* statement of a prejudiced Papist,—itself contradicted by another contemporaneous writer of the same faith, and equally hostile to Wicliff,—every fair and unprejudiced reader will take the confession of the reformer, and this condemnation of it by the convocation, as sufficient evidence that in the time of trial he was found equal to the emergency. So far, too, were his statements from satisfying the advocates of the notion of transubstantiation, that immediately after their publication he was assailed by six several antagonists, each asserting and attempting to defend that dogma. His judges likewise expressed, by the significant character of their decision, the strongest condemnation of the doctrinal opinions of Wicliff. They did not indeed consign him to martyrdom, a tenderness for which other causes can be assigned than any mitigation of hostility to his opinions. The English nation was then unaccustomed to the work of death in defense of the doctrines of the church ;—and even the tiger long unused to blood becomes comparatively gentle. The heretic, too, was now becoming old, and disease, heightened by cares and excessive mental labor,

promised speedily to relieve them of the object of their fears, without the odium of an ecclesiastical murder. The personal friends of the reformer were then numerous and powerful, and doubtless a commotion highly prejudicial to the hierarchy would have resulted from the adoption of extreme measures affecting his person; an apparently more gentle but equally effectual course was therefore adopted. By virtue of letters received from the king, who had become intimately allied with the hierarchy, his connection with the university was dissolved, and himself banished from the scene of his long and painful conflicts. He had however first scattered abroad the seeds of gospel truth in that seat of learning, so plentifully as to defy all subsequent efforts to remove them. He was presently afterward cited to answer in person for his faith and conduct to the pope, who then in the person of Urban VI. held his court at Rome. He had also been attacked by paralysis, which rendered it impossible for him to obey the Papal mandate had there been no other objection to his so doing. He therefore wrote to Urban excusing himself for his necessary neglect to obey the summons, in consequence of his inability to travel; but the opportunity to remind the pope of some of his duties was too

good to be permitted to pass unimproved. He confesses his willingness to tell his belief to all true men, and especially to the pope,—presuming that if it be right he will “conserve it,” but if it be error, he will “wisely amend it.” He then professes his faith in Christ as God-man, and in the gospel as God’s law, to which all are obliged, and especially the pope, since he is most highly exalted among the officers of the church. He then reminds him that the greatness of Christ’s vicars is not measured by worldly greatness, but by a more virtuous life,—and especially that Christ’s poverty both of spirit and possessions should be emulated by one so highly exalted in the church of Christ. He then declares his belief that no man should follow the pope, nor any saint now in heaven, further than they followed Christ, since the best of men have sinned. He then adds as “wholesome counsel,” that the pope should leave worldly lordships to worldly lords, and move all his clerks to do so, as Christ and his disciples did and taught others to do. He declared his readiness to comply with the pope’s summons, were he able, and adds, “but Christ has needed me to the contrary, and taught me more obedience to God than to man;” to which he supposes the pope will submit, as to do otherwise would

be to oppose Christ and become “an open anti-christ.” He then concludes with an apparently complimentary salutation to “our pope Urban VI.,” under which he conveys a pungent rebuke and paternal exhortation, warning him that a man’s enemies are those of his own household. The letter is, on the whole, a curiosity of its kind, and clearly indicates the peculiar state of the reformer’s religious convictions, and especially his unalterable determination of character.

After his expulsion from Oxford, Wicliff retired to Lutterworth, to devote himself to the interests of his parish, and from his retreat to send forth, in the shape of tracts and treatises, such missiles as might urge on the strife that he had long labored to set on foot. If a judgment should be formed from the number and extent of his publications during this period, the two last years of Wicliff would appear to have been the most active portion of his life. The disease which forbade his attempting a journey to the Papal court was happily not so severe as to impair his mental powers, nor to render him incapable of all necessary bodily activity. To write in full the history of the last two years of his life would require the biographer to analyze a long list of publications of considerable extent, which followed each other in rapid suc-

cession. His parochial and pulpit duties were punctually and conscientiously performed, and, besides these labors, he issued during this period fourteen or fifteen different treatises, several of which are among the most important of his writings. It is scarcely to be supposed that these were all begun after his departure from Oxford; but in most of them that were then first published there are allusions to contemporaneous events, which prove that they were at least revised after that event, and as some of them relate to affairs newly transpired, such must have been originally conceived at that late date. The spectacle they present to us is singularly interesting. They set before us the example of a man worn down by a life of toil and anxiety,—smitten with a malady which might seem to command a cessation of all harassing exertions—just escaped from the jaws of destruction, and constantly expecting that persecution would soon do her worst upon him,—yet learning no lesson of indolence or cowardice from these perils and troubles. On the contrary, his energies seem to have grown upon him as the shadows of death thickened around his temples. Never, perhaps, since the commencement of his warfare was Wicliff more formidable to his enemies than during the season of

his final banishment to Lutterworth ; never was his voice more loudly raised in the cause of Scriptural truth than at the approach of that hour which was to silence it for ever.

Notice has already been taken of the great schism of the Papacy, and the consequent scandal of two rival popes, each claiming exclusive infallibility, and mutually thundering their anathemas against each other. England, as above noticed, adhered to Urban VI., the Italian pontiff, who held his court at Rome ; while France, with her allies and dependencies, supported the claims of Clement VII., who resided at Avignon. From her relative importance among the friends of the Italian, as well as from her rivalry with France, England was looked to as his chief dependence ; and, proud of the distinction, the hierarchy of that kingdom seemed intent upon showing themselves worthy of the honor thus conferred upon them. A crusade was proclaimed—not for the recovery of the Holy City—but to establish the title of one of the rival pontiffs against the other ; and as the cause was considered as eminently sacred, an ecclesiastic, it was thought, should conduct it. Accordingly choice was made of Henry Spencer, the youthful bishop of Norwich, whose high birth, unimpeachable orthodoxy, inflexible devotion to

the church, and spirit of martial enterprise, appeared to render him singularly adapted to so glorious an enterprise. He is described by an admirer of his chivalrous heroism, as “armed to the very nails, grasping his lance in his right hand, burying his spurs in the flanks of his charger, rushing with the fury of a wild boar into the midst of the rascal crowd, and there dealing confusion and havoc around him.”

To give the necessary impulse to the enterprise, the primate issued a mandate calling for the prayers of the faithful in its behalf, since its object was the extermination of the heretics. But what was infinitely more efficacious, “marvelous indulgences” were, by the pope, placed at the disposal of the episcopal commander, which enabled him to collect an incredible amount of treasure, of which the female sex were the chief contributors. Absolutions for both quick and dead were set to sale at reduced prices, and the ministry of angels stipulated for to snatch souls from purgatory, and bear them to the realms of bliss, provided always, that the price was devoted to the maintenance of the holy war. By such means a vast motley multitude were speedily gathered around the standard of the warrior prelate. But though possessed of a sufficiency of mere animal courage,

he was wholly unfit to conduct the enterprise he had undertaken. The army of crusaders passed over the sea, and after spreading devastation and carnage through a considerable portion of Flanders, returned, having accomplished nothing in favor of the cause of the pope, and he who went forth followed by prayers and benedictions, returned to receive only contempt and opprobrium.

While these things were in process of execution, Wicliff was not an uninterested observer of the movements about him. He could, of course, have no sympathy with the cause of either of the rival popes, whom he denounced as the cloven head of antichrist; and yet less could he approve of the means by which the crusade was promoted. It was a similar prostitution of the use of indulgences that roused Luther to open opposition to the Papacy, and no doubt had Wicliff never before declared for a reformation, he would have been impelled to do so by the course taken to promote the crusade against the Avignon pope. His opposition to the crusade was most decided and very strongly expressed. In his "Objections to the Friars," published about this time, though probably most of it was written at a much earlier period, he speaks of this war as undertaken to make Christ's vicar the most wealthy in the

world ; and in “The Sentence of the Curse Ex-pounded,” he complains that they have brought “the seal of the banner of Christ on the cross—that is the token of peace, mercy, and charity—to slay all Christian men, for the sake of two false priests, who are open antichrists, to maintain their worldly state, to oppress Christendom.” He then asks, “Why will not the proud priest of Rome grant full pardon to all men, to live in peace, and charity, and patience, as he doth to all men to fight and kill Christian men?” A similar train of remarks occurs in the treatise on “The Seven Deadly Sins,” a work in which among other matters he strongly condemns all wars undertaken for ambitious or revengeful purposes, and goes far toward inculcating the doctrine of entire non-resistance to injuries. The warrior’s honor he considers of a very doubtful character, and sarcastically remarks, that the knight who derives his honors from the slaughter of his fellow-creatures is frequently outdone by the hangman, who “killeth many more, and with a better title.” A fighting priest he esteemed no better than a fiend, stained foul with homicide ; “and the popes, he adds, would do well to give heed to these truths when they fight against each other, with the most blasphemous leasing that ever issued out of hell.”

We have now to contemplate our reformer in the closing period of his career. His enemies had so far triumphed as to banish him to his own parish, and to brand him as a heretic; but it is probable, that in the course of divine Providence these things were all intended to advance the cause in which he was engaged. In the comparative quiet of his rectory he found opportunity to revise his unfinished manuscripts, and to prepare them to go forth to accomplish their leavening purpose in the world. Accordingly he now sent forth his most important publications in rapid succession. No less than fourteen treatises were thus issued during the years 1383-4; comprising the most voluminous of his original productions. Among these the "Trialogus" deserves a prominent notice—a work consisting of four books, subdivided into numerous chapters. Its form, as its title denotes, is that of a conversation conducted by three persons, in the course of which most of the principal doctrines of Christianity, and especially those that were called in question at that time, are freely discussed. His "Objections to Friars," his "Sentence of the Curse Expounded," and "The Seven Deadly Sins," have already been mentioned. Some of the rest were: "The Deceits of Satan and his Priests,"—

“The Duty of Lords ; Of Servants and Lords, how each should keep his Degree,”—“Of Good Preaching Priests,”—“On the Four Deceits of Antichrist,”—“On the Prayers of Good Men,”—“Of Clerks Possessioners,” besides three or four other tracts.

His pulpit exercises, for the same period, were peculiarly interesting. His zeal remained entirely unabated, though it glowed with a chastened and purer spirit of piety. His rebukes of the prevailing sins of the times, and especially those of the church and hierarchy, are such as must have caused the ears of his hearers to tingle, and the hearts of the fearful and desponding to quake with consternation. Still his tone, though severe, is deeply devotional, and he seems to have felt that he was quickly to render an account to his Judge for his conduct in the exigencies into which he was now drawn. He evidently felt that his course was beset with peculiar difficulties and extreme personal danger, and very probably he expected to finish his course by suffering martyrdom. He seems to have counted the cost of his warfare, and to have prepared his mind for the worst. In his later writings there occur passages which indicate this, and which show that with another and greater advocate of the truth,

he might have said, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself." There were, however, a variety of causes which conspired for a season to divert the blow of his powerful adversary from the devoted head of the reformer. The rival pontiffs were still hurling their anathemas against each other, and distracting the kingdoms of Europe by their scandalous and bloody strifes ; and England itself was far from being in a state of internal repose. Wicliff, too, had friends in high places, and probably it would have been highly impolitic for either the primate or the king to have pushed matters to the extreme against him. Probably the near approach of the end of his active life, if not of his death itself, was anticipated by his enemies, who would choose to await the sure course of premature old age, and increasing infirmities, rather than incur the odium and danger of his martyrdom. He was accordingly permitted to pursue his course unmolested within the parish of Lutterworth, till death at once relieved him of his toils and anxieties, and his adversaries of the chief object of their dread and hatred. To the last he continued his personal ministrations among his people, and had the happiness to finish his course in the public execution of his sacred

functions. On the 29th of December, 1384, while in the parish church of Lutterworth, engaged in the celebration of the holy eucharist, he was a second time seized with paralysis. The attack was severe, wholly depriving him of the power of speech, and the use of his limbs. In this condition he lingered two days, and then sunk to rest, on the last day of the year 1384, and in the sixty-first of his age. His remains were deposited beneath the chancel of the church where he had so often and so faithfully declared the truths of the gospel; where they rested in peace for nearly half a century, when the fiendish but impotent malice of his enemies obtained an order from the council of Constance, that his bones should be disinterred and removed from sacred ground. The grave was accordingly violated, but whether the right bones were chosen is very doubtful; but such as were presumed to be his, were removed and burned, and the ashes cast into a neighboring brook—one of the branches of the Avon. "And thus," says Fuller, "this brook did convey his ashes into the Avon, the Avon into the Severn, the Severn into the narrow sea, and this into the wide ocean. And so the ashes of Wicliff are the emblem of his doctrine. It is now dispersed *all the world over.*"

CHAPTER X.

CHARACTER OF WICLIFF.

HAVING traced the subject of these pages through the active period of his life until he “ceased at once to work and live,” and, as far as our scanty means will allow, having delineated his characteristic features in detail—it may now be profitable to view his character as a whole. Wicliff is known to the world almost exclusively by his writings; and in these the author is never directly spoken of, and seldom alluded to. From our point of observation, he seems as one moving in a dense mist, whose finer features are dimly seen, though his general form and more decided actions may be noted with a good degree of clearness. Hence, he appears as a sort of disembodied agency. To delineate his character would require the creative genius of the novelist, rather than the unpretending truthfulness of the biographer. Though, during a part of his life, his history is intimately connected with that of his country, yet even here the individual is hidden in the public functionary; and the man Wicliff is less seen than the divinity lecturer, the rector of Lutterworth, the

royal ambassador, or the counselor of the parliament. With regard to the details of his early life—the habitual complexion of his temper—the turn of his conversation—his manners in private life—his inclinations and antipathies—his friendships and alienations—of these we have only the most remote and the faintest information.

The only circumstance recorded of him that falls within the description of an anecdote, is the interview with the friars who visited him when they supposed him about to breathe his last; and this is such as to make us greatly regret that it stands alone in his history. That affair is highly characteristic of the times and the parties concerned, and presents the reformer in the light in which his friends delight to contemplate him. But for the most part, we must be content to hear him as a voice crying in the wilderness, and through a long course of years putting forth an incessant and heart-stirring testimony against long-standing and intolerable abuses. Other reformers are known to us as men whose whole course lies open to our notice, and with whom we are able to sympathize, not only in the strifes of public conflicts, but also in those more powerful agonies through which the spirit must struggle before it seizes upon

the truth which is able to make it free. But Wicliff appears as an almost entirely solitary being, standing before us in a grand and mysterious loneliness. We may admire his greatness, and commend his decision and energy of character; but we contemplate his life with but faint emotions and without personal sympathies.

The town of Lutterworth long retained various traditions relative to the private life and habits of its ancient and renowned rector. He is especially represented as an admirable example of excellence in all the duties of a parish minister. A portion of each morning, it is said, was regularly devoted to the relief of the necessitous, to the consolation of the afflicted, and to the offices of kindness at the bedside of the sick and dying. This account accords with the more authentic statements of the views of the reformer respecting the pastoral office, and, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, is altogether credible. The duties of the Christian ministry constituted a theme upon which he was accustomed to dwell; and his faithfulness in the discharge of the duties of a religious teacher is attested by the extant remains of his pulpit discourses. It requires no stretch of charity, therefore, but only ordinary fairness, to conclude that he was exemplary in all the

duties of his holy calling. "Good priests," he himself remarks, "who live well, in purity of thought, and speech, and deed, and in good example to the people, who teach the law of God up to their knowledge, and labor fast, day and night, to learn it better, and teach it openly and constantly, these are very prophets of God, and holy angels of God, and the spiritual lights of the world." Such were his views of the dignity and the responsibility of the work in which he was engaged, and all that we know of him goes to persuade us that in practice he magnified his office.

As a reformer, Wicliff is especially distinguished for his originality. It was for him to break the uninterrupted sleep of ages, and to sound the voice of reproof before the hitherto unreproved hierarchy of England. The Waldenses had indeed trimmed the flickering lamp of a pure Christianity in their mountain fastnesses, through long successive centuries of moral darkness; they had also sent forth many a herald of the gospel into other portions of Europe; but England, from its insular and remote position, as well as from its strict alliance with the Papal court, remained untainted with the suspicion of heresy. Only in a single instance had the continental nonconformists sent emissaries into that

kingdom, and the sad result of that mission, together with the distorted accounts given of their doctrines and morals, brought no good to the cause of reformation. It is doubtful whether Wicliff had any considerable information respecting the sects of the Waldenses and Albigenses, or any adequate ideas of their doctrinal opinions and religious practices. In his earlier compositions they are scarcely named; while in the later, they are only transiently referred to, in such terms as to indicate that he had learned to consider them a devout people, who had long suffered from the cruelty of Papal tyranny. But while he frequently refers to the sources of his information on matters of religious opinion, and appears solicitous to shield his views from the charge of novelty, by references to previously existing doctrines of the same or similar character, there is no acknowledgment of indebtedness to these sectaries of the continent. The history of his own country afforded him no precedent for either his opinions or his actions. Many of his opinions bear clear indication of their own originality; and are, by strongly marked features, distinguished from the corresponding Waldensian notions. The works of the early fathers, and the pages of divine inspiration, were at any early period familiar to

Wicliff; and to the end of his life they continued to be almost his only guides. In his religious controversies, he seems to have regarded himself as associated with the wise and good of remote ages, though standing in his own age nearly alone amid the general corruptions of the church.

In respect to his learning, we have the united testimony of his friends and enemies that he was the most extraordinary man of his times. His attainments were not, indeed, such as would render a man pre-eminent in the present advanced state of learning; but to estimate him fairly he must be judged according to the standards of his own age. His preferments, and the duties assigned to him, indicate the highest confidence in both his learning and his capacity for the most important duties. To the ordinary scholastic and scientific acquirements, Wicliff added a knowledge of the Scriptures—a kind of learning almost entirely peculiar to himself. It is not pretended that his taste was always correct, nor that his course of reasoning is always pertinent and happily chosen; but compared with his cotemporaries, he excelled in nearly every form and kind of erudition. By nothing else is he so plainly distinguished as by his intellectual independence. His was an age

of almost unparalleled tyranny in every department of learning. Authority had taken the place of reason; and men were compelled to cast their thoughts into certain given forms, and to think and reason according to certain artificial and arbitrary maxims, under the penalty of universal contempt, and the loss of all claim to sound learning. That Wicliff became, in some degree, the slave of this tyranny is certain; but it is equally plain, that his strong common sense often asserted its prerogatives, and led him to seize upon the truth in its naked excellence, and to substantiate his assumptions by appeals to the natural dictates of the human understanding. But it was in matters of religion that the intellectual despotism was most fully developed. Here all the machinery of superstition was brought to act in concert with a false philosophy in debasing the understanding, and enslaving the conscience. The decisions of the church were placed above all scrutiny; and the duty of the faithful was confined to implicit faith and blind obedience. The authority of the church was absolute—for her decisions were assumed to be infallible. To inquire further, was therefore an act of impiety, and a profane meddling with sacred things. Against this fearful array of

scholastic and ghostly despotism, Wicliff presumed to assert the independence of his own mind, and to appeal to the authority of the word of God, interpreted by the rules of common sense. In this bold movement he was unsupported by any kindred spirit; for though some half approved of his course, even they feared to follow him; while, by the most, it was denounced as the madness of revolutionary zeal. But while subject to the imputation of every motive that might serve to cover his name and his tenets with odium, and while threatened with the heaviest maledictions of the church; the only change that his opposition to the existing corruptions underwent, was from a less to a more intense dislike, and from a more feeble to a louder emphasis. So comprehensive, indeed, were his views of Christianity, and the claims of his species, that the increased facilities and superior adaptation of recently adopted methods of diffusing religious knowledge, are little more than a development of the plans designed and partially brought into use by Wicliff. Among the principal means by which so great an increase of Christian light and experience has been effected within a century past, are an itinerant ministry of the gospel—and the circulation of the Bible and religious

tracts; and these were Wicliff's means of acting on the masses for their religious improvement.

It has been fashionable with some persons, of whom better things might have been expected, to depreciate the personally religious character of Wicliff—presenting him to our contemplation rather as the enemy of the abuses and superstitions of the Papacy than the devout and spiritually minded follower of Christ. To this, the exciting grandeur of his actions may have contributed, by diverting attention from the less dazzling beauty of spiritual devotion. An unprejudiced and careful perusal of his writings, however, will not fail to convince the pious reader that he was actuated by a nobler motive than a love of demolishing the idols of superstition. While laboring to promote piety, he was brought into collision with the corruptions of a false religion, and, by the necessity of the case, he became a man of contention. There had been found others, in the bosom of the Romish Church, who had labored to improve the spirit of piety in that communion; but their efforts were always neutralized by their unpopular manner of expression, or more commonly by such a strict conformity to the worse than idle mummeries of the mass-book and calendar, as rendered their increased sanctity a

further means of ghostly imposture. It was the purpose of Wicliff at once to destroy and to build up; for the former he showed himself competent by his firmness and intellectual power; for the latter, his fitness is best demonstrated in his success, as seen in the improved morals and piety of his disciples.

A passing notice may be due to the charge of want of delicacy in Wicliff's discussions and invectives. It would be but a poor justification of his manner to say that it was as good as that of any of his cotemporaries; though this could be retorted with much force upon his Popish adversaries. Compared with the language of the Popish writers, who, during his own and the succeeding generations, speak of the reformer, his is amiable and gentle, even to tame-ness. But cursing is the prerogative of that corrupt communion. It should also be borne in mind, that the meaning of language is, in a great measure, conventional, so that what at one time would be deemed wholly unexceptionable, would at another seem altogether intolerable. Expressions and terms change with the fashions of the times, and in many cases the most offensive meaning is now conveyed in language that, four hundred years ago, would have seemed too soft and effeminate to be uttered by one

claiming the name of man. Compared with more modern reformers, Wicliff's manner of expression will not appear to disadvantage. Both Luther and Calvin could have given him lessons in the accomplishments of railing; and Knox would probably have affrighted the poor rector of Lutterworth by his stentorian tones of denunciation. The charge of coarseness will be found to apply to Wicliff with less force and fairness than to almost any writer of his own or the succeeding century.

To some, there may seem to be a want of consistency between the avowed opinions of Wicliff respecting ecclesiastical endowments and his enjoying the use and emoluments of them. He evidently regarded such endowments as a departure from the original spirit of Christianity, whose rule respecting the maintenance of its ministers is, "Freely ye have received, freely give;" and had he been called to reconstruct the ecclesiastical system of his country, he would undoubtedly have made the clergy dependent upon the voluntary offerings of the people. But he found the system of endowments in use, and it was not in his power to effect the change that he desired; he must therefore submit to the existing state of things, and receive his maintenance, as a minister of Christ,

in the only way provided for him. The value of the preferments he received is not known, though in all probability it was greater than needful for his support in the moderate style of living that he would choose. How he disposed of his surplus income is unknown; but as the pen of the defamer has never charged him with covetousness, and as his own system made the possessor of preferments the almoner of his patron's bounty to the poor, it is but just to suppose that he faithfully executed the trust which he conceived to have been committed to him, by "visiting the fatherless and the widow in their affliction." This presumption is strengthened by the traditional accounts at Lutterworth respecting the pastoral character and fidelity of the reformer; for the minister that frequents the house of mourning and the abodes of wretchedness finds occasion to minister to the bodily, no less than to the spiritual, wants of their inmates.

Before taking leave of these matters, further notice should be taken of the disposition manifested by certain writers to distinguish our reformer as a restless political agitator, rather than as a devout and spiritual disciple of Christ. It is indeed well known that he was more than once called upon for services by the secular authorities; though, in each instance, the service

required related to the affairs of the church. That he labored to secure the rights and interests of the Church of England at the Papal court does not surely distinguish him as fond of ecclesiastical politics, and that eye must indeed be evil that sees cause of fault-finding in his consenting to answer the parliament respecting the lawfulness of resisting the exactions of the Papacy. That he was chaplain to the king, and also received the living at Lutterworth by royal favor, are not sufficient to convict him of an undue intermeddling with the affairs of state,—but rather the reverse. The last ten years of his life were almost exclusively devoted to his academical and parochial duties, leaving him but little time to pay his addresses at court;—and his writings, produced during this period, very fully prove that he had learned to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. While these valuable remains of the pen of Wicliff survive, his friends will not want the means of proving that no confessor was ever animated by a more disinterested and unworldly spirit, than he who enjoyed the friendship of Edward, the protection and favor of John of Gaunt, and the almost wholly unprecedented confidence of the British parliament.

Reflections upon the life and character of Wicliff almost necessarily lead one to compare and contrast him with the leader of the great Reformation of the sixteenth century. There are doubtless many parallels in the histories of the two reformers, though perhaps still more points of contrast. Both were educated in the system of superstition which they subsequently labored to overthrow,—and both advanced by painful and unpremeditated stages to the adoption of the sentiments that now distinguish their names. Both were devout from their youth, and long before they contemplated any decided opposition to the hierarchy, as such, were aware of its abuses, and engaged in opposition to some of its sanctioned practices. In the controversies thus excited, both appealed to the word of God as the standard of religious faith and duty, judging even the decisions of popes and councils by its supreme authority ;—and to both was awarded the high honor of giving the Scriptures to their fellow-countrymen in their own language.

On the other hand, they are equally clearly distinguished by wide and marked differences both as to character and circumstances. As to energy of character, Wicliff's was untiring and indomitable, though somewhat modified by

caution; Luther's was impulsive and wholly reckless of danger, but inclined to grow weary when the excitement of conflict abated. To be a reformer implies, not only rectified notions of religious doctrines, but the moral courage requisite to proclaim unwelcome truth, and to reprove sin even in liveried honors, and among pontifical dignities. Wicliff and Luther, therefore, are names of men of the same class,—a class to which Erasmus and Melancthon can make no just pretensions, and even the claims of Cranmer may be somewhat questioned. To such a one cautiousness may be of use, provided it be possessed in less degree than the more impulsive qualities of mind ; and it may be presumed that with Wicliff's prudence, Luther would have been less successful as a reformer, though perhaps more amiable as a man. The glare and splendor of circumstances with which the career of Luther is surrounded give the highest sublimity to his history. On the foreground of the scene, only the monk of Wirtemburg and the mitred pontiff appeared,—the one hurling invectives, the other anathemas ;—the latter belching forth the maledictions of the holy see, consigning his victim to present and eternal perdition, the former indignantly casting the Papal bull of excommunication into the flames, and

bidding the thunders of the Vatican defiance. To such a view of the subject, Luther seems as one of more than earthly courage and intrepidity, and as though sustained by invisible auxiliaries. And so he was supported, though the agencies of his support were not altogether invisible. Ages of ecclesiastical abuses, reluctantly submitted to by the German princes, had prepared a people impatiently ready to sustain any opposition to the court of Rome. The Papacy likewise, from long repose unbroken by the petty strifes of distant barbarians, had become secure and inactive, so that when resistance began, the Romish hierarchy was taken by surprise, and found unprepared for the conflict. And after the strife had fully commenced, though led on by the monk from the cloister, yet potentates and titled dignitaries were his allies and supporters ; and in the sequel he had

A kingdom for a stage, princes for actors,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene.

The circumstances of Wicliff, though less dazzling, were more awfully sublime. To the conflict with the spiritual corruptions of the Papacy, he went forth unsustained by the favor or the countenance of nobles and princes. The king had become the partisan of his primate, who was acting as his chief prosecutor; the duke

of Lancaster not only refused to sustain him, but presuming upon his former regard for the reformer, forbade him to proceed; his interest in the parliament was inadequate to secure him from the hands of his persecutors, and even the university cast him off as a rotten and offensive member. Yet he proceeded in his course undismayed, though instantly expecting that persecution would quickly do its worst upon him, and from the quiet of his parish continued to hurl firebrands of truth into the camp of his enemies, till the kingdom was enlightened by the flame, and the lovers of darkness troubled in the place of their former guilty security.

Germany, at the time Luther began his career, had been for ages the field of ecclesiastical battles, the region of storm and tempest, ever rising and breaking their forces upon each other; England, on the contrary, at the time of Wicliff was the dead sea of Popish orthodoxy and conformity, whose sluggish waters had hitherto remained unruffled by any breeze from a purer sky. Luther had but to follow the footsteps of others, though less decided and less successful, reformers, but Wicliff's course was marked by the footsteps of no predecessor. In solitary grandeur, with no guide except the compass of divine truth, like the adventurous discoverer of

the new world, he set out in search of the region of a purer Christianity, and attained to it in quite as high a degree as his German successor.

The two reformers were agreed not only in investing the sacred Scriptures with supreme authority, but also in regarding Augustine as the best human expositor of Christian doctrines. But as superstition had more completely subdued the mind of the German, so his emancipation was effected by a more painful and violent process. The darkness of despair in his spirit was suddenly exchanged for the light of gospel grace, when first he apprehended the doctrine of justification by faith; and so strong was the impression made upon his feelings by that event, that he seems to have concluded that he had found the key of the kingdom of grace, that had been lost since the ages of the primitive church, and therefore he is exhibiting it on all occasions, and proclaiming its inestimable value. Wicliff esteemed that tenet no less highly than Luther, though, having been brought to feel and appreciate its excellence more gradually, it is mentioned by him in a less impassioned tone, and more commonly associated with the accompanying graces of the Holy Spirit. As to the eucharist,—the English reformer was certainly the

more Scriptural in his opinions, and in his views of ecclesiastical polity he came much nearer to the primitive simplicity of the golden age of Christianity.

Luther began his course as a reformer at an earlier period of life than did his English predecessor, and also advanced for awhile more rapidly toward the truth ; but his progress was unequal, and even fitful, at the best times, and in the latter years of his life, in several important particulars, his course was rather retrograde than progressive ; while the evangelical knowledge and Christian zeal of Wicliff steadily increased in clearness and intensity to the last. And in the much disputed particular of courage, respecting which the one has been loudly applauded and the other chiefly suspected by his friends and maligned by his enemies, the disadvantage of the Englishman is more specious than solid. That Luther was the more excitable, and the more daring when his blood was heated, —that he excelled in animal courage, is granted ; but in respect to the higher qualities of cool moral courage he was comparatively defective. What would have been his course had he been left in abandoned loneliness for the space of two years, expecting continually the heavy hand of the Papacy to descend upon him, which only delayed its

stroke, that its power might be more surely and severely felt—may not be easy to determine; though it is plain that a higher order of courage is demanded by such a situation than that which was called into exercise at the diet of Worms. It is related in the natural history of the lion, that though he is unmoved by danger in its most formidable aspects, yet his courage gives place to trepidation when he hears the voice of the denizens of the dunghill;—so Luther, who could not be dismayed by the wrath of pontiffs and princes, became alarmed at the extravagances of Carlstadt, and trembled before the fanaticism of the Anabaptists. But Wicliff, unmoved alike by fear or favor, staying himself alone upon the excellence of truth, and his faith in the power engaged to maintain it, was always confident, always firm, and even in the most forbidding prospects always cheerfully hoped for the success of the cause for which he labored.

Without detracting from the praise due to either of the eminent servants of God whose characters are here brought into comparison, it is proper to render appropriate honors to each, and in both to magnify the wonderful power of divine grace. Wicliff and Luther are kindred names in the annals of the church militant, as doubtless they will be found kindred spirits, and

partners of the same honors, in the church triumphant.

Some estimate of the character of Wicliiff may be made from the expressions used in reference to him by both his admirers and his enemies. The former, though his name was cast out as evil by the great ones of his own and succeeding times, comprised persons of very considerable parts and standing, especially at Oxford, and these did not fail to vindicate the reputation of their friend and master. In another chapter, a fuller notice will be taken of the progress of the reformer's doctrines and the number and influence of his disciples. The following described testimony of the university of Oxford may serve to illustrate the estimation in which he was held by many persons connected with that ancient seat of learning. It does not appear on what occasion and for what purpose that document was issued, though it were easy to conceive of times and seasons when such an instrument would be esteemed of the greatest value in vindicating the personal and doctrinal character of the reformer from the aspersions of his enemies. As it bears the seal of the university, its authenticity is placed beyond question, though it is possible that this letter commendatory was issued not in a full convocation of all the regents, but on some

occasion when the friends of Wicliff happened to be in majority. Whatever opinion may be formed as to its origin and authenticity, it unquestionably declares facts respecting the reformer's immunity from ecclesiastical censures, and especially from conviction of heresy; for though some of his opinions had been so condemned, his person remained untouched. In this singular paper, the university, after speaking of the propriety of proclaiming and perpetuating the good deeds of illustrious persons, that others may be excited to like worthy actions, and defamers put to silence, proceeds to declare and testify its special good will to John Wicliff, and to "witness all his conditions and doings, throughout his whole life, to have been most sincere and commendable." The document concludes with this strong declaration: "Wherefore we signify unto you by these presents, that his conversation (even from his youth upward to the time of his death) was so praiseworthy and honest, that never at any time was there any note or spot of suspicion noised of him. But in his answering, reading, preaching, and determining, he behaved himself laudably, and as a stout and valiant champion of the faith; vanquishing, by the force of the Scriptures, all such who by their willful beggary blas-

phemed and slandered Christ's religion. Neither was this said doctor convict of any heresy, either burned of our prelates after his burial. God forbid that our prelates should have condemned a man of such honesty for a heretic, who among all the university had written in logic, philosophy, divinity, morality, and the speculative art, without peer. The knowledge of which all and singular things, we do desire to testify and deliver forth; to the intent that the fame and renown of this said doctor may be more evident and had in reputation among them to whose hands these present letters testimonial shall come."

As an offset to the above testimony of the university of Oxford, we annex the following account of the death of Wicliff from the chronicler, Walsingham, which, though conceived in a very different disposition and temper from the foregoing, is no less honorable to its subject:—
“On the day of St. Thomas the Martyr, archbishop of Canterbury, that organ of the devil, that enemy of the church, that confusion of the populace, that idol of heretics, that mirror of hypocrites, that instigator of schism, that sower of hatred, that fabricator of lies, John Wicliff—when, on the same day, as it is reported, he would have vomited forth the blasphemies which he

had prepared in the sermon against St. Thomas —being suddenly struck by the judgment of God, felt all his limbs invaded by the palsy. That mouth which had spoken monstrous things against God and his saints, or the holy church, was then miserably distorted, exhibiting a frightful spectacle to the beholders. His tongue, now speechless, denied him even the power of confessing. His head shook, and thus plainly showed that the curse which God had thundered forth against Cain was now fallen upon him. And, that none might doubt of his being consigned to the company of Cain, he showed by manifest outward signs, that he died in despair.” “ After he had been smitten with the palsy, he dragged out his hated life till St. Sylvester’s day. On which day he breathed out his malicious spirit to the abodes of darkness.”

The above is an ebullition of the same spirit that subsequently attempted to disturb the repose of his ashes, and to vent its impotent malice upon his unconscious remains. This excess of spleen is sufficient evidence that his doctrines survived him, and were still formidable to his enemies; and as the author of the above extract had learned his manners in the school of the Romish hierarchy, whose rule is to supply any want of argument by a plentiful

daubing of the peculiar slime of Papal Rome, we may conclude that this virulence of invective was occasioned by the want of better arguments to sustain a bad cause. It is, therefore, a valuable testimony in favor of him whom it was intended to defame.

CHAPTER XI.

OPINIONS OF WICLIFF.

THOUGH the religious opinions of Wicliff may be gathered to a good degree from the preceding chapters, it may not be unacceptable, nor without some real advantage, to view them arranged and digested in something like systematic order. The general notion of his belief, which represents him as one holding and maintaining the great doctrines, since known as those of the Reformation, is doubtless correct; and that not only generally, but, as will be seen presently, particularly also. Every class or body of persons, living at the same time, and discussing the same topics, have their own peculiar terms and modes of expression, which receive a fixed and peculiar meaning, sometimes differing considerably from their common acceptation. It would therefore be highly improper to expect

that others removed from such associations should use the same modes of expression, even if the same thought was intended to be conveyed. This consideration should not be lost sight of when Wicliff's opinions are compared with those of the reformers of the sixteenth century; otherwise his different manner of expressing his views may lead the superficial reader to suspect that he was ignorant of the peculiar doctrines of the Reformation. But if things, rather than words, are attended to, it will be found that the English reformer of the fourteenth century was quite as thorough in his Protestantism as his German compeers of the sixteenth.

It is proper to begin a review of the reformer's opinions by noticing his views respecting the fundamental doctrine of reformed Christianity,—that of justification by faith. Upon this point Wicliff has been considered by Melanchthon as failing to recognize this doctrine, and that censure has been reiterated by succeeding ecclesiastical writers, who make high pretensions to an exclusive and super-excellent Protestantism. This charge could originate only in an undue attention to terms and forms of expression, for though Wicliff does not place that great doctrine so constantly and prominently

forward as does Luther, yet that man must be perversely blind who can read the writings of the English reformer, and not find the essential substance of the doctrine in question.

Nor was this tenet merely incidental to the theological system of our reformer ; it was fundamental and essential to it. When he opposed the friars, and the whole system of religious fraternities, he did so by setting forth the sufficiency of Christ's method of salvation, and the utter worthlessness of human merit and works of supererogation. When he denied the supremacy of the pope, he did so by exalting Christ as the only Saviour of mankind, on whom whosoever believes shall have everlasting life. When he opposed the doctrine of transubstantiation, it was to place faith in its true dignity, as the only way to Christ, and the only means of receiving him, even in his own ordinances. When he expounded the "Sentence of the Curse," and exposed the impotence of the pontiff's thunders, he did it by asserting the soul-cheering doctrine, that none can lay anything to the charge of God's elect ; that whom God justifies none can effectually condemn. But it is not alone to necessary implication and indirect expressions that we may look for this great truth of religion in the writings of Wicliff,—the same is

clearly and most explicitly stated in direct terms. He tells us that the merit of Christ is sufficient to redeem mankind from hell, without the concurrence of any other cause ; that faith in him is sufficient for salvation ; that they who truly follow him are justified by his justice, and made righteous by participating in his righteousness. The merits of the Saviour evidently formed the central object of his meditations. And if at any time he seems to speak well of human merit, it is not to exalt it in comparison with the merits of Christ, but to show that before the great Judge of all every man must stand or fall by his own personal doings, and not by any good offices of his confessor, mass-priest, or other spiritual agent. He conceived it to be not only consistent with the righteousness of faith that men should be holy in heart and life, but that it was necessarily implied in that blessed doctrine ; so that while he exalted Christ as the fountain and source of all goodness, he required that they who were in Christ should have their fruits to holiness, and where such fruits did not appear, though priestly benedictions, and all ghostly mysteries were present, he accounted them worthless.

His notions of human depravity and original sin are strongly and pointedly expressed, prov-

ing him to have been thoroughly penetrated by a sense of our totally lost and helpless condition by nature. "Heal us, Lord," he exclaims, "for naught; not for our merits, but for thy mercy. Give us grace to know that all thy gifts be of thy goodness. Our flesh, though it seem holy, yet it is unholy. We are all originally sinners, not only from our mothers' womb, *but in our mothers' wombs*. We cannot so much as think a good thought, unless Jesus, the angel of great counsel, send it; nor perform a good work, unless it be properly his good work. His mercy comes before us, that we receive grace, and followeth us, helping us, and keeping us in grace." These quotations, which are but specimens, which might be multiplied to almost any extent, sufficiently vindicate their author from the charge of Pelagianism.

On the other hand he has been suspected of maintaining the doctrine of absolute necessity—a tenet which in its full practical application annihilates not only human merit, but responsibility also, and even reduces vice and virtue to mere names. That his love of scholastic topics should have tempted him to enter the mazes of that labyrinth is not surprising; and that when he had done so, he should have found himself compelled to acknowledge that he could not con-

ceive that there should be any effective impediment to the divine will, was likewise to be expected. But he professes to modify this proposition by assuming that since we are ignorant of the purposes of God, future occurrences may present themselves to our understanding as so many possibilities, and that all his promises and threatenings must be received by us as under a condition either tacit or express. This may serve to cut the knot that has always baffled every attempt to untie it; and it may be added that succeeding predestinarians have done little more than follow the example of their great predecessor, in preaching a philosophical doctrine of necessity, and a practical one of free moral agency and responsibility. His discussions of this subject are almost entirely confined to his more recondite treatises, in which the scholastic method prevails; in his more popular works the subject is seldom alluded to, and very sparingly discussed. It is abundantly evident, that for all practical ends he was firm in his persuasion of man's liberty of choice, and his responsibility to God for the exercise of such power. No doubt in these discussions he found himself able to bewilder his opponents, and it is equally plain that he did not escape being himself entangled in his own sophisms.

The Papal delusions, invented to enrich and aggrandize the clergy at the expense of the laity, by the introduction of penances, pilgrimages, and similar impositions, found in him a most uncompromising opponent. To all this mass of religious corruption he opposed the simple, but sublime doctrine, of a free remission of sins, in virtue of the atonement made by Jesus Christ. But he adds the caution, that the penitent alone can be assured of pardon, and that the spirit of penitence is the free gift of divine goodness. It is evident that this supernatural aid was considered by the reformer as extending, in some degree, to all men, so as to render the condemnation of the finally impenitent the just recompense of willfully rejecting offered mercy. The doctrine of Wicliff, when stripped of its worse than worthless scholasticisms, therefore, was, that we are saved from both the guilt and the defilement of sin by the power of divine grace, which grace is so freely offered to all men that none can perish for want of the means of salvation. Wicliff's opinions respecting the pope's temporal power have been pretty fully exhibited in the preceding narrative. Against the worldly ambition of the pretended successors of St. Peter he arrayed all his powers of reasoning and his

arts of persuasion, addressed to princes and temporal lords. The shameless extent to which ecclesiastics of the middle ages carried their pretensions is truly remarkable. The pope, as Christ's vicegerent, claimed authority over all princes and civil governments, and presumed, at times, to dispose of kingdoms, to absolve subjects from allegiance to their legitimate sovereigns, and to command one king, by his love of Christ, to make war upon another who might have offended the holy see. It has been shown that these preposterous claims were discarded by the reformer, nearly twenty years before his death, when he plead in favor of withholding the Papal tribute granted by King John; and, subsequently, the political schemings of the pontiff procured for himself, from Wicliff, the title of "the evil man-slayer, poisoner, and burner of the servants of Christ."

While the head of that worldly kingdom, which had been introduced into the church, was thus rebuked and resisted, the partisans and supporters of the usurpation are not permitted to pass without due notice. The tendency of their zeal for ecclesiastical authority is pointedly referred to its final tendency, in the exaltation of the prelates and the corresponding degradation of kings and secular lords,

to whom alone he concedes a divine right in civil affairs.

Previous to the Reformation it was a matter of frequent occurrence for churchmen to claim an entire independence of the civil government, both as to their persons and estates. Both civil and criminal processes from the king's courts were often evaded by pleading the privileges of the order, and their responsibility only to their spiritual head. Crimes of the most flagrant character were for this cause, in many cases, permitted to go unpunished; and demands for pecuniary advances were resisted by pleading the superior claims of their spiritual sovereign. But it was among the early doctrines of Wicliff that the authority of the magistrate should be final as to the wealth of the clergy, and to the whole of their conduct, considered as members of society. Against their claims of exemption from the power of the civil magistrate he opposed the doctrine and example of Christ and his apostles, who were themselves obedient to kings and temporal lords, and taught others to be so; and he deduced the same conclusion from the act of Solomon in putting down an unfaithful and rebellious high priest, and appointing another in his stead. The absurd and fatal consequences of this assumed exemption

he further shows, by supposing their irresponsible power to be used by the clergy for the impoverishment or even the subversion of the kingdom. In such a case, according to these pretensions, there would be no redress—the clergy might first amass an indefinite amount of wealth, and then none could forbid them to remove it from the kingdom, or even give it over to the king's enemies; and were the clergy to conspire the death of the king, or engage in other treasonable acts, the civil magistrates might not punish these daring delinquents with the smallest possible forfeiture of liberty or goods. Against none of the abuses of the Romish Church, as practiced in his times, was he more decidedly severe than against this pretended exemption from civil authority by the clergy; and no part of his reformed doctrines met with a more decided opposition from the hierarchy.

Wicliff's enemies have taken great pains to convict him of entertaining notions of the rights of subjects wholly subversive of every social institution. He has been pertinaciously accused of holding the doctrine sometimes designated that of "dominion founded in grace." The substance of this absurd and dangerous dogma is, that the rights of government, and even of

proprietorship, are dependent upon a state of acceptance with God; and, therefore, that any act of mortal sin works a forfeiture of their dominion with princes, and of their estates with subjects. And the effects thus forfeited, at once become the rightful property of the saints of God—who, if princes, may seize upon the forfeited domains of a wicked king; or, if commons, they may possess themselves of the goods of their neighbor whom they judge to have fallen under the divine displeasure.

It would not be difficult to collect a volume of extracts from the writings of Wicliff, to demonstrate that no doctrine was embraced by him at all affecting the legal possession of property. He knew that many things might be lawful, as done by the supreme Judge, which would be flagrant injustice, as performed by man, except in obedience to a mandate from the Judge, as in the case of the Israelites and the nations of Canaan. This distinction, which he always kept in view, seems to have been wholly overlooked by his accusers. It is not denied that he considered the churchman, who had fallen into mortal sin, as having forfeited his office of a minister of Christ. In every such case, however, he would have transferred the office so degraded, together with its jurisdiction

and its revenue, to other and more worthy hands; and this maxim it was that brought upon him the reproach of favoring a disruption of the social system. To save themselves from the consequences of such a doctrine, the clergy labored to make it appear that the creed of their assailant teemed with revolutionary novelties, such as must apply to civil, no less than to ecclesiastical, offices, and prove as perilous to the possessions of the laity as to those of ecclesiastics.

But while it is certain that no sanction of popular violence could be derived from the creed of the reformer, he knew that the relation subsisting between the governing and the governed involved mutual obligations. Hence, as the governed are cautioned against the evils of insubordination, and restricted to the use of rational and constitutional means, in seeking the redress of grievances; governors are reminded that they are the recognized ministers of God in the use, and not in the abuse, of their power. He therefore asserts, that though by the force of some human institutions the name of king, prince, or lord, may be retained in favor of men who indulge in "wrongs and extortion," such rulers are, in truth, "traitors to God and to his people." And as civil government was plainly

instituted for the protection of its subjects and for the equal administration of justice, the magistrate who shall contravene, or neglect the duties of his office, is admonished that for this cause the providence of God will very probably transfer his power to more faithful hands.

The point at which the wrongs of tyranny may be innocently encountered by force the reformer does not attempt to define ; nor indeed can any other than a very general rule be given by any one. In these views, as well as in many others, Wicliff appears to have been centuries in advance of his contemporaries, and even the developments of the present age show that he was fit for the teacher of this generation.

But in the fourteenth century, the doctrine of Wicliff as to the power of the magistrate with regard to the church was a much greater novelty than anything taught by him with respect to the secular government. We have seen that he regarded the clergy as subject to the magistrate in everything affecting the social interests of the laity ; and that he considered the property of the church as held entirely subject to the crown, and justly liable to share in the burdens of the maintenance of the commonwealth. He also looked to the state for the exercise of its power in protecting its subjects from the persecuting

malice of the clergy; and knowing that there was no good cause to expect a reformation of abuses from a set of men who subsisted upon their profits, he held it to be the duty of the magistrate to reform the ecclesiastical establishment. According to the notions taught by the Popish priesthood, the magistrates were little better than the slaves and drudges of the hierarchy. It pertained to them to execute the persecuting sentences of the ecclesiastical courts, and under the penalty of ghostly censures to submit to the odious task of performing the work of blood for inquisitorial prelates; while these claimed a perfect independence of civil authority. Such indignities were sometimes resisted by the magistrates, and then the ecclesiastics are described as “cursing the king, and his justices and officers, because they maintain the gospel, and the true preachers thereof, and will not punish them according to the wrongful commands of antichrist and his clerks.” Wicliff held it to be right and expedient to seek for protection against clerical persecution from the bearer of the civil sword; and he accordingly asked of the state to see “that no priest nor religious man in our land should be imprisoned without an open trial, and true cause fully shown to our king, or to his proper council.”

To extend this protection to devout men, and to effect this momentous revolution with respect to the property of the hierarchy, and the character of its ministers, is declared to be the province of the magistrate,—involving a duty that can be neglected only at the peril of his soul.

His opinions respecting ecclesiastical endowments, and a constrained contribution for the support of the ministers of religion, were peculiar and truly remarkable considering the age in which he lived. He denied the divine authority commonly claimed in favor of the custom of tithes; for though he acknowledged that such a custom was incorporated in the Levitical system, yet he assumed that both the ritual and the polity of that dispensation had passed away, leaving only its moral precepts binding upon the church under the gospel. The revolting exhibition, that he had so often witnessed, of the progress of the collector of tithes through the parish, spreading terror and consternation—robbing the laborious poor of their earnings, to enrich a profligate and idle priest—had produced in him such a deep disgust of clerical rapacity, that while inculcating most emphatically the duty of the instructed to provide for their spiritual teachers, he was ever ready to avow the doctrine, that where the priest failed notoriously

in his office, the people were absolved from the duty of maintaining him. "True men say," he writes, "that prelates are more bound to preach truly the gospel than their subjects are to pay them dimes; for God chargeth that more, and it is more profitable to both parties." It seemed to him that instead of extorting such tribute from the poor, their influence should be employed in promoting the edification of their people, and in disposing the opulent and the powerful to befriend the needy.

The office of patron of a living he conceived to be one of the highest responsibility, and requiring a devout fidelity in the discharge of its duties. Such he exhorts "to do their alms for the love of God, and for the help of their souls, and for the help of Christian men." They are also admonished, that in bestowing their benefices upon men, averse or inadequate to these spiritual services, they become partakers of their sins. Though he loudly and steadily declaimed against the abuses of patronage, and its corrupting influence on the church, he in no case favored any invasions of the rights of patrons, either by the state or the court of Rome. He indeed commiserates the parish, which is by its patron given up to an "idiot, who cannot do and may not learn to do, the office of a good curate."

The rulers of the nation and the patrons of livings are accordingly exhorted, if they would perform their duty as guardians of the best interests of the kingdom, to separate all churchmen from worldly offices, and from the snares of wealth. Still it should be remembered that his tenderness toward the office of patrons did not arise from his approval of that institution, but from his love of order and his dread of revolutionary violence. He evidently considered the whole system of ecclesiastical endowments a manifest departure from the spirit of the gospel, and essentially evil in its tendencies. He would have had the estates of the clergy, and especially of the religious orders, restored in a regular and constitutional way to the laity, for the general good of the commonwealth, and especially as a provision for the poor. The income of the clergy he would have restricted to the voluntary offerings of the people; to be used first, for a plain and frugal maintenance of their spiritual guides and teachers, and secondly for the relief of the necessitous in their respective flocks.

Against this primitive method of supporting the ministers of the gospel, the combined influences of authority, wit, and learning, have been arrayed by those who have found their wealth in the “craft.” It has especially, and with most

plausibility, been contended that without some adequate legal provision for the maintenance of the clergy, a sufficient number of properly qualified persons could not be found who would assume the laborious and poorly paid duties of the sacred office. This objection, however, was much more plausible in the days of Wicliff than at present, since it is now proved by facts, that ministers of the gospel, of sufficient qualifications,—men of deep devotion and active industry,—are ready to serve the church not only without legal provisions for their maintenance, but in despite of the overshadowing influence of an exacting and purse-proud clerical aristocracy. Nor was the reformer at a loss for arguments to meet such objections. He readily granted that among the persons aspiring to the office of churchmen, many would relinquish their object if assured that their support must arise solely from the free-will offerings of the people. But he also affirmed that should this policy reduce the clergy to one-third of their present number, the change would be highly beneficial, if that portion should bring with them the true spirit of their office. The ecclesiastical system which he seemed to favor amounted to about this:—“Let the parochial boundaries of the ecclesiastical state remain; let the present system of

patronage remain undisturbed: let the persons thus appointed require nothing of the magistrate but protection; and to supply the deficiency of the want of settled pastors in some parishes, and of unfaithful and incompetent ones in others, let such priests as may choose to become itinerant evangelists be allowed to do so, regulating their course by the necessities of the people and the prospect of usefulness."

His object, therefore, seems to have been to preserve the machinery of the religious establishment, but to admit into it so much external influence as might serve to counteract its necessary tendency to inertness and decay. But that which in Wicliff's day was only a theory has since been in a good degree reduced to practice. Four hundred years later, when revolutions affecting every portion of the body politic and ecclesiastic had passed over the kingdom, Wicliff's imaginary system of church polity was attempted to be reduced to practice by another son of Oxford, and another reformer of the Church of England—John Wesley. The attempt, so far as it relates to the hierarchy, was evidently a failure. The new wine, by the violence of its fermentation, threatened to break the old bottle, and, to prevent such a catastrophe, it was therefore cast out—the new piece

sewed into the old garment did not agree therewith, and so the rent became worse. Instead of having gone too far in his opposition to the established ecclesiastical system, he evidently failed to apprehend all its perverse incapacity for good, and conceived that by amendments its essential tendency to evil might be corrected. If such a mistake should seem in some degree to detract from his claim to intellectual acumen, that is amply compensated for by discovering that amiableness of heart that "hopes all things," even when unable to "think no evil."

The whole history of Wicliff's life, and the constant tendency of his writings, are a perpetual manifestation of his opposition to the supremacy of the pope, as well spiritually as temporally. That he accorded a precedence of honor to the bishop of Rome—arising, perhaps, from the general assent of the church—is granted; and, probably, had the popes been but half as eminent for the graces of the gospel as they were for the dignity of their station, he would have gladly rendered them honors adapted to the incumbents of the first office in the church of Christ. But whatever may, at any time, have been his respect for the pope, in the *ideal* perfection of his character—of the *actual* pope, he scruples not to pronounce that he is the veriest

antichrist. He steadily contended that Christ in heaven is the only true head of the church; and, therefore, that its spiritual headship must not be sought among men: and as to the popes, they were at best no more than Christ's ministers to serve the church—and if they were of profane life and manners, so far from being the spiritual heads of the church, they had neither part nor lot in it; but were under the curse of God, and exposed to eternal perdition.

In elevating the Papacy to the proud eminence to which it pretends, a numerous gradation of inferior dignities have been invented and incorporated into the ecclesiastical system, so that, instead of the equality of a common brotherhood, as ordained by Christ, a series of spiritual princes is seen rising above each other, till at the proud eminence of power is placed the pontiff assuming the prerogatives of the Almighty, and usurping the dignity of Christ in his own church. Each of these several orders of the spiritual aristocracy must feel its dependence upon the head, and is, of course, interested in asserting and maintaining its inviolability; and any attempt at a reformation in that part must meet with the united opposition of cardinals, bishops, and archdeacons, as well as of monks, canons, hospitalers, and friars.

These gradations appeared to the mind of the reformer as not only unauthorized by Scripture, but also injurious to the peace and spirituality of the church. The distinctions of seculars and religious he discards as an invention of the devil; and asserted that "all should be of one religion, as priests, and deacons, living the life of clerks." He also remarks,—" By the ordinance of Christ, priests and bishops were all one. But afterward the emperor divided them, and made bishops, lords, and priests their servants; and this was the cause of envy, and quenched much charity." In his Trialogus the same doctrine is freely inculcated. He there observes,—" I boldly assert one thing, namely, that in the primitive church, or, in the time of Paul, two orders of the clergy were sufficient, that is, a priest and a deacon. In like manner I affirm, that in the time of Paul, presbyter and bishop were names of the same office. . . . From the faith of the Scriptures it seems to me to be sufficient that there should be presbyters and deacons holding that state and office which Christ has imposed on them, since it appears certain that these degrees and orders have their origin in the pride of Cæsar."

But while all gradations of authority among the secular clergy is thus rejected, their general

claims as an order are considered both legitimate and sacred. His views on this point have been shown in a preceding chapter. This concession, however, is not made with regard to the monks and the mendicants. The rules of these orders he considered in themselves opposed to Scripture, and their tendency only evil ; while the parochial clergy have simply to return to the spirit of their vocation, to become, indeed, the fathers of their people, and the chief benefactors of their country. That, however, which chiefly offended our reformer, in the case of these fraternities, was the reflection which their very existence cast upon the wisdom or the benevolence of the Redeemer. Their preference of human inventions to the known example and the plain instructions of Christ, since it imputed defect to his Godhead, is viewed as involving the essence of blasphemy. While such were his views of the very nature of these institutions, it is natural to suppose that he considered it to be the duty of the civil authority to exert its legitimate powers in their entire suppression, and the sequestration of their property. His views, relative to the nature and constitution of the Christian church, were such as comport with his enlightened notions of the Christian ministry. He rejected as unscript-

tural, the doctrine that makes the church consist exclusively of “churchmen,” which term is applied, in the language of prelacy, exclusively to the clergy. He held that the laity as really enter into the constitution of the church as do the clergy, and declares, “All who shall be saved in the bliss of heaven are members of holy church, and no more.” And again,—“Christian men, taught in God’s law, call holy church the congregation of just [justified] men, for whom Jesus Christ shed his blood.” In common with most orthodox divines of Protestantism, he distinguishes between the visible church, comprehending all who profess the religion of Christ, and the invisible church, consisting only of genuine believers—though none but God can certainly distinguish the members of the latter from the hypocritical members of the former.

He also held the authority of the church, however solemnly enunciated, as inferior to that of the Scriptures—and wholly disregarded tradition as a co-ordinate rule of faith; maintaining that all things necessary to salvation might be found in the sacred volume; and that it was both the privilege and the duty of all orders of persons to make free use of that, and to derive thence a knowledge of all things

necessarily pertaining to their spiritual affairs. "The law of Christ," he declares, "infinitely exceeds all other laws"—in the Holy Scriptures, he adds, "all truth is either expressed or implied." "Other writings can have worth or authority only so far as their sentiment is derived from the Scriptures."

It should be observed, however, that the right of private judgment, as asserted by Wicliff, was not a liberty to reject established opinions without examination. On the contrary, he insisted upon the exercise of patient inquiry, and a disposition to learn the truth whatever it may be, as necessary qualifications for the profitable study of the Bible.

Respecting the Romish doctrine of purgatory, Wicliff is generally supposed to have come less fully to the light of the gospel than upon most other points. That he recognized and embraced the notion of an intermediate state for departed spirits is evident; but this is no less a doctrine of Protestantism than of the Church of Rome. But it should not be forgotten that this doctrine, as maintained by the reformer, was separated from nearly everything that had rendered it so alluring to the Popish clergy. The custom of praying for the dead is certainly of much earlier origin than most of the departures of the

nominal church from the purity of the gospel ; and, as it arises very naturally from a tender and intense though ill-informed desire to profit the departed objects of our affections, it commends itself to our sympathies even while it is condemned by our better judgment. Though the doctrine of an intermediate state is embraced, the notion of purgatorial pains need not be also admitted ; and though such doctrine naturally supposes the imperfection of the condition of spirits in that state, it does not imply that they are necessarily unhappy, nor that their condition and future destiny are in any degree uncertain. The Protestant notion of the intermediate *state* (which must be admitted by all who expect the resurrection of the body, and a general judgment, whatever they may say of an intermediate *place*) teaches, that in that state departed spirits await the general judgment, in incipient pleasure or pain, according to the final doom to be pronounced upon them at that day ; their future estate being surely and unalterably sealed in the divine purposes. Accordingly neither purgatorial pains nor intercessory prayers can avail for them. A careful examination will show that Wicliff's views upon this subject, though in several important points highly defec-

tive, were much nearer to the Protestant than to the Romish standard.

In one of his early pieces he cites Augustine, apparently with approbation, in teaching that "souls in purgatory are helped and comforted, and brought out thereof by the fasting of kinsmen, by the alms of friends, and by the devout prayers of good men and saints." At that period he was evidently a disciple of that celebrated father in his attachment to the fond notion of the efficacy of prayers for the dead. In one of his later treatises, he confesses "that saying of masses with cleanness of holy life, and burning devotion, most pleaseth almighty God, and profiteth to Christian souls in purgatory, and to men living on earth to withstand temptations to sin." This, it will be seen, is a much more guarded statement than the preceding, and does not necessarily imply any of the peculiar doctrines of Romanists relative to this subject. That he had learned to discard the efficacy of all priestly intervention, and especially the mercenary services of corrupt priests, for the benefit of either the departed or the living, is evinced by the following exclamation, found on the same page with the foregoing extract:—"Ah, Lord! how much is our king and our realm helped by

masses and prayers of simonists, and heretics full of pride, and covetousness, and envy, and who so much hate poor priests, because they teach the gospel and the life of Christ." In another of his later treatises he accuses the clergy of "inventing new pains, horrible and shameful, to make men pay a great ransom;" and adds, that all masses, "for which money is taken," are "devices of Satan, and contrivances of hypocrisy and avarice."

In some of his latest writings upon this subject; he seems not to have wholly discarded the notions of purgatorial pains, and of temporary sufferings in the intermediate state by those who shall finally come forth to the bliss of heaven. Nor does he fail to imply that intercessions may be profitably made by the living on behalf of the dead; but the privilege of offering such intercessions is claimed for all Christians—the laity no less than the clergy—and these not in virtue of their clerical office, but of holy living and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The doctrine was thus divested of all its value as a source of gain, and without that it would soon be abandoned.

But in one of his last productions he seems to go yet further in his advances toward a complete emancipation from the toils of superstition,

and to suggest some doubt of the efficacy of the prayers even of good men in behalf of the departed. In that work he cites the words of the Saviour, "let the dead bury their dead," as discountenancing such practices altogether. For several of his last years he made but few allusions to this tenet, and these were very cautious, and calculated almost invariably to separate it from its corruptions and abuses. From his increasing perceptions of the truth respecting this doctrine as manifested in his later writings, it is doubtful whether, at the time of his death, he considered the intermediate state in any degree properly purgatorial.

The custom of praying *to* the departed—commonly styled the invocation of saints—like that of praying *for* them, was opposed by Wycliff with a firmness that increased with the growing clearness of his perceptions of spiritual things. At an early period he had learned to regard many who were raised to the dignity of saints as persons whose salvation was by no means certain; and he saw that to confide in the aid of such must be worse than in vain. After awhile he seems to limit such invocations to those whose beatified state could be ascertained by Scripture; and at length he discountenanced the whole practice as unauthorized, and as at vari-

ance with a due regard to the mediation of Christ.

In respect to the use of images in religious worship, the mind of the reformer advanced slowly and steadily from Romish idolatry to the truth of the gospel. In his exposition of the decalogue, written about ten years before his death, he adopts the argument used in common by Papistical and heathen image worshipers—that the image itself is not the object of devotion, but the thing meant to be represented thereby. The Church of Rome uses the same apology for its shameless violation of the second commandment, calling the images “laymen’s books.” But it has never been found practicable to restrain “ignorant folk” from rendering divine homage to the wood and stone, and thus contracting all the guilt of the most degrading idolatry. The fallacy of this defense was acknowledged by the reformer before his death, and its identity with the apology offered by heathen idolaters led him to condemn the use of all images and similitudes in religious worship, as essentially displeasing to God.

The Popish doctrine of indulgences found in Wicliff a firm and decided opponent. The sale of these commodities first roused Luther to oppose the abuses of the Roman see, and was thus

made to contribute largely to the great Reformation in Germany. But Luther was not more decidedly an enemy to this most barefaced of even Popish abuses, than was his English compeer, nearly two hundred years before him. A few extracts, selected from a mass of a similar character, must serve to illustrate this point. "Prelates," says the English reformer, "fouly deceive Christian men by their pretended indulgences or pardons, and rob them wickedly of their money." Of the doctrine itself he affirms that it was "never taught in all the gospel, and never used, neither by Paul, nor Peter, nor any other apostle of Christ; and yet they might, and could, and were so full of charity as certainly to have taught and used this pardon, if there had been any such. . . . And since Christ discovered and taught all that is needful and profitable, and still taught not this pardon, it follows that this pardon is neither needful nor profitable." As the efficacy of indulgences was thought to avail especially in behalf of the departed, he remarks, adverting to the condition of souls in the intermediate state, "It passeth man's knowing what is the doom of such souls. It seemeth then great pride for sinful man to make himself certain and master of the judgment of God, which still he knoweth not. Also,

if this pardon be a spiritual and heavenly gift, it should be given freely as Christ teacheth in the gospel, and not for money, nor worldly good, nor fleshly favor. . . . Since then this pardon, *if there be any such*, should be freely given, it is theft and robbery to take thus much gold for it. Also, this pretended pardon deceiveth many men. For rich men trust to reach heaven thereby without pain, and therefore the less fear to sin; and of contrition, and forsaking sin, and doing alms, little is spoken." After reciting a number of the most obvious and weighty objections to this pernicious tenet, he thus concludes: "It seemeth then, for many reasons, that this feigned pardon is a subtil merchandise of antichrist's clerks, to magnify their pretended power, and to get worldly goods, and to make men free from the fear of sin, and sweetly to wallow therein as swine." If it is esteemed a sufficient evidence of great moral courage in Luther, that he questioned this assumed authority of the Church of Rome, still more should like praise be awarded to Wicliff, who, in less favorable times, equally decidedly denounced this appalling spiritual despotism.

Respecting the celibacy of the clergy, Wicliff likewise broke away from the iron superstitions of Rome. He did not, indeed, avail himself of

the right, which he claimed as belonging to his order, to marry ; but he asserted that right in plain and strong terms. In one place he remarks, “ Since fornication is so perilous, and priests are so frail, God ordained in the old law that priests should have wives ; and in the new law never forbid it, neither by Christ nor by his apostles, but rather approved it. But now, through the hypocrisy of fiends and of false men, many bind themselves to priesthood and chastity, and forsake those who by God’s law are their wives, and injure maidens and wives, and fall into all vices most foully.” It required not a little firmness to avow such opinions at such a time ; and yet it is probable that the re-former entertained a reverence somewhat tinged with superstition for the state of celibacy, when observed with proper sanctity, and not made an occasion and a cloak for licentiousness.

In respect to the sacraments, it is known that Wicliff acknowledged the seven usually styled such by the Church of Rome ; but it should be borne in mind, that his idea of a sacrament was somewhat peculiar. He styles a sacrament, a visible sign of something invisible, which is so general a definition as to allow of, not seven only, but “seventy times seven” sacraments. It is but justice to take his own statements as

to these doctrines for our rule in ascertaining his opinions. Respecting the five Popish ceremonies called sacraments, he undoubtedly held them of inferior excellence to the sacraments of the gospel, though he honored them with respect when used with proper care, and without superstitious dependence upon their efficacy. As to the so-called sacrament of penance, he was far removed from the prevailing doctrines of Romanism. The duty of confessing sin, as well as forsaking it, would naturally be felt by one who drew his lessons of instruction from the word of God; but the practice, as found in Popish systems, resulted chiefly from the pretended efficacy of priestly absolution. Wicliff, though he admitted the propriety of a form of absolution, (which form he evidently considered to be declarative, and not of itself efficacious,) denied that a penitent offender could not be absolved without such form. He also admitted the fitness of acknowledging sins to a priest, on account of the sanctity of his calling; but when greater sanctity of life was found in a layman than in a priest, such a one was esteemed better fitted to receive the confession of the penitent and to administer the consolations of religion. In one of his later treatises he declares, that the manner of making con-

fession has varied at different times ; and that in the time of the apostles men confessed themselves to God and to the common people—a practice which he regrets had fallen into disuse. His advice, therefore, is,—“ Seeing that many men often confess themselves to their confessors in vain, confess thyself to God, with constancy and contrition, and he may not fail, he will absolve thee.” It is plain, therefore, that though Wicliff called the act of confession, and the declaration of pardon, by the name used by the Church of Rome, yet he wholly discarded the sacramental character of the act, and all the spiritual prerogatives claimed by the priesthood, of authoritative intervention between the penitent sinner and his forgiving God.

On confirmation he remarks, that “the oil with which the prelates anoint children at such times, and the linen hood, or veil, put over their head, are a ceremony of little worth, and one having no foundation in Scripture.” He also adds this further caution, that “the child, or man, receiveth not the gift of the Holy Spirit from the bishop, but as the gift of God.” It is also further stated, that “it does not appear that this sacrament should be reserved to a Cæsarian prelacy ; that it would be more devout, and more conformable to Scriptural language, to

deny that bishops give the Holy Spirit, or *confirm the giving of it*; and that it, therefore, seems to some that the brief and trivial confirmation of the prelates, and the ceremonies added to it for the sake of pomp, were introduced at the suggestion of Satan, that the people may be deceived as to the faith of the church, and the state and necessity of bishops may be the more acknowledged." Elsewhere he complains of the importance attached to this service as a disparagement of "the more worthy and needful sacraments." His views upon this point seem to have been, that a formal recognition and adoption of their baptismal vows should be required by the church, and rendered by all, who, having received baptism, desire to come to the full participation of the privileges of the church—that this should be done with due solemnity, but agreeably to the simplicity of the gospel economy—and that for all its offices, the church—embracing the pastor and the congregation—was fully competent.

His notions respecting orders were equally at variance with the doctrines of the Papacy. He speaks of clerical ordination as "a power conferred on a devout clerk by the ministry of a bishop, that he may duly minister to the church." He also describes the prevailing doctrine to be,

"that a clerk is not ordained except as a bishop shall grant him the Holy Ghost, and thus imprint a character on his mind which is indelible; and, accordingly, if a clerk be degraded, or whatever else may happen to him, this character may not be lost." All this he considered as a fond creature of the fancy; and as he saw that the character so derived was frequently of little worth, he prayed that the clergy might receive some more efficient qualification from a higher source. He clearly distinguished between the ordination of the prelates (which might be submitted to for the sake of order, and to guard against abuses, but could impart no real grace or fitness for the office of the ministry) and that of the great Head of the church, by which alone the minister is at once called and ordained to execute all the functions of a minister of the gospel of reconciliation, without prelatical aids, or ecclesiastical intervention.

Marriage he styled one of the seven sacraments; but evidently, in this case, he used the expression in a very vague sense. Among his scholastic works are found some curious, and perhaps it should be added puerile, speculations upon this subject; but nowhere does he give us any occasion to suspect that he considered this

institution as properly sacramental. Probably his speculations carried him quite as far from the notions of the Romish Church as she is from the truth.

As to extreme unction, while he permitted it to remain in the list of the sacraments, he said but little about it, and seems to have considered it of but little worth; and hence he was accused of heresy upon this point. It is not known that he availed himself of it at the article of death.

Respecting the true and proper sacraments of the gospel, his views are singularly correct and evangelical. It is indeed wonderful how he was led by the word and the Spirit of God to reject nearly all the trash and falsehood of Romanism relative to these great topics, and to come directly to the truth as taught in the inspired volume. Luther passed his whole life vacillating between truth and error upon these points, and died, leaving them undetermined; Zwingli broke wholly away from the Papal superstition, but proceeded to degrade the sacraments below the dignity placed upon them in Scripture; and even Cranmer, though long coming to the truth, scarcely reached an equal fullness of Scriptural orthodoxy with that in which Wycliff spent the season of his permanent sojourn at Lutterworth.

As to who are proper subjects of baptism, his views were the same that have prevailed, with a very few exceptions, among Protestants in all ages, and among all nations claiming the Christian name; and so highly did he value the privilege of infants to receive Christian baptism, that he approved of its administration, even by females, rather than that one should die without receiving this seal of the covenant of grace. As to the future state of infants who die without baptism, he confessed that he was unable to determine anything; not that he seems to have doubted their salvation, for he gives it as his opinion, "that without this washing, Christ may spiritually baptize infants, and, in consequence, save them;" but that as they received no visible sign of the covenant of grace, their salvation, though really the effect of covenanted mercy, is effected in a peculiar and inscrutable manner.

Respecting the nature of this sacrament he remarks, that "baptism with water" is significant of "baptism with the Spirit." And in another place, "Bodily baptizing is a figure showing how man's soul should be baptized from sin. . . . Bodily washing of a child is not the end of baptizing; but baptizing is a token of the washing of the soul from sin, both ori-

ginal and actual, by virtue taken of Christ's death." In his view of the subject, baptism is a sacramental figure of "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost," and not, as some fancy, a memorial of the death and resurrection of the Saviour.

Respecting the holy eucharist, he shunned, with singular felicity, the diverse misapprehensions into which more modern reformers have fallen, and, at the same time, completely escaped from the grossly idolatrous doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome. He confessed the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, but not so as to embrace the impanation, or consubstantiation of Luther, yet exalting the ordinance above the merely commemorative rite of Zwingle. He strongly insisted that the bread used in this rite is not changed by the priest, or any other agent; that after, as before consecration, it is bread and nothing more. And yet he calls it "God's body"—in a peculiar, perhaps it may be said in a mystical, sense. But to all questions beyond this his answer is said to have been, "I neither grant it nor deny it." In his conclusions, published at Oxford, at the commencement of his sacramental controversy, he asserts, that "the consecrated host is not Christ, nor any part of him, but an effectual sign of him"—and

that "Christ is not seen in the host by the bodily eyes, but by faith."

In his confession made to the synod at the Gray Friars, he first acknowledged his belief that the real body of Christ is present in the eucharist; this however he materially qualified, and presently added, "We believe there is a threefold method of the presence of Christ's body in the consecrated host;—to wit, a virtual, a spiritual, and a sacramental presence, . . . and besides these three modes of presence, there are three others, more real and veritable, which are appropriate to the body of Christ in heaven;—to wit, substantially, corporeally, and dimensionally." We may be somewhat in doubt as to the propriety of the language, which declares that the "*body*" of Christ is present, but not *corporeally*, or that represents a body as existing, in a given place, but not substantially nor dimensionally there,—but the sense is plain,—the presence of Christ, though confessed to be *real*, is also declared to be *really figurative*. Though a real body, in the reformer's sense of that term, it had not the essential attributes of a body, as that term is commonly used. By throwing aside as worthless the hair-splitting distinctions of the schoolmen, Wicliff's doctrine on the eucharist will be found, in all essential particulars, to

coincide with the most orthodox evangelical Protestant churches.

Among the minor articles of Wicliff's creed may be noticed his views respecting public worship. Here the reformer was quite as fully developed as in his doctrinal opinions. The burdensome and fantastical ritual of the established worship found no sympathy in his heart. Esteeming the public worship of God as an institution of unspeakable worth, he not only cherished it as such, but submitted—though reluctantly—to its cumbrous appendages, rather than forego the privilege of worshiping God in his sanctuary. He did not utterly condemn all ceremonies,—but was greatly grieved to see the slightest departure from these “bodily exercises” more dreaded than a breach of God's commandments.

That fruitful source of church difficulties, the psalmody, received due notice from Wicliff. The fantastic and frivolous indecencies of choir singers were highly offensive to his love of simplicity, and to his exalted conceptions of the solemnity and spirituality of the worship of God. To give additional weight to his animadversions on this point, he in one instance introduces the words of St. Austin, saying, “As often as the song pleases me more than the sentence sung,

so oft I confess I sin greviously,"—a sentiment worthy to be remembered and practiced upon by all who have the ordering of this part of public worship.

Wicliff considered fasting to be a Christian duty, and a means of grace, when practiced in due moderation; but all beyond this he censures, as presumptuous emulation of Christ and the prophet Elijah. As to that kind of canonical fasting that consists in abstinence from certain kinds of food, but allows a free use of others, he denominated it "*fool-fasting*," and esteemed it no better than hypocritical gluttony.

The mental acumen of the reformer is in no particular more clearly evinced than in his rejection and condemnation of judicial astrology. In an age when that art reigned predominant, and to doubt its pretensions was esteemed a near approach to atheism,—he affirmed that the astrologer's art was destitute of any solid foundation, and that his practices were but a tissue of impositions.

In reading the writings of Wicliff, it will be perceived that he adopted for himself, and treated as generally received, the notion that the thousand years of Satan's confinement were past, and that he was then engaged in his last and most violent assault upon the church. The

millennium has always been a fruitful theme for fanciful and speculative religionists. It has been esteemed now past,—now present,—and now future ; while the ever-changing phases of received interpretations prove that as yet the church knows not the mind of the Spirit in that portion of the written word. In Wicliff's time, two opinions prevailed as to the beginning of the thousand years of the Apocalypse, both of which, however, were agreed in making the time then present the period of Satan's enlargement. He seems to date the happy millennium from the beginning of the Christian era, so that it had ended more than three centuries before his time ; others placed its commencement at the time of the incorporation of the church with the state by Constantine ; which reckoning made the loosing of Satan occur in the fourteenth century. This notion is treated by the reformer as one generally understood and altogether undisputed ; which is sufficient evidence of its general prevalence.

This conviction no doubt had a decided influence upon his feelings and actions. He saw “the fiend” in all the vices of the age, and believing the world to be peculiarly exposed to Satanic influences, he was ready to suspect the power of the great enemy in all the institutions

of the times. Hence he denounced the Popish hierarchy as the kingdom of antichrist, and the mendicants and false clergy as “children of the fiend;” and suspecting the received doctrines of such a church, he was led to reject all traditions and merely human authority, and to derive all his religious opinions from the word of God.

In estimating the character of Wicliff one is almost necessarily led to inquire, what would have been the peculiar characteristics of English Protestantism, had it been the will of Providence that the reformation of the church should have been effected by his immediate agency. After duly examining the subject, we are inclined to favor the opinions of those who think that, under his auspices, the reformation of the Church of England would nearly have anticipated that effected by Calvin, and England would have become, ecclesiastically, such as Geneva is. Episcopacy would have been greatly modified if not wholly abrogated, and ministerial parity asserted ;—ecclesiastical endowments would have been mostly, or perhaps altogether, applied to other purposes, and the voluntary system of supporting the ministers of the gospel introduced ;—public worship would have been stripped of its pompous but vapid ritual, and not

unlikely the peculiar dogmas of Calvinism would have found a place in the national confession of faith.

He was evidently more a Puritan than a churchman, and though, had he been his contemporary, he probably would have co-operated with Cranmer, it is not to be presumed that he whom John of Gaunt could not restrain, would have been wholly submissive to Henry. Under the protection of Lord Cromwell or the duke of Somerset, he would have been an efficient agent in reforming the church, both in pulling down and building up. In the days of Mary he would have accompanied Rogers, Latimer, and Cranmer to the stake, or in those of Elizabeth he would have been ejected with Cartwright and the nonconformists. As it was, he was born in due time, served his generation faithfully, and made the church in all future time, especially in England and among the descendants of the English, infinitely his debtor. Himself a reformer of his own age, he became, by his labors and writings, “the morning star” of the great Reformation of the sixteenth century.

CHAPTER XII.

DISCIPLES OF WICLIFF.

HITHERTO we have considered Wicliff's history almost wholly in relation to himself; but this work would be defective should we fail to notice the effects of his efforts upon his own and subsequent generations. That his evangelical labors were not without success is more than intimated in the preceding pages—their full effects require a more complete exhibition.

It may appear wonderful that a single individual should be able to resist the powers of the hierarchy, and to propagate doctrines and inculcate practices so decidedly hostile to the Romish Church, when the power of that church was at its height. But a more careful observation will disclose certain causes, of secondary importance, but sufficiently strong to modify and restrain the actions of the Papacy and its supporters. The aggressions of the clergy upon the ancient rights of secular lords were not made without awakening distrust and opposition; so that the latter were often much inclined to resist the claims of churchmen, and to countenance every effort to confine them to their appropriate spirit-

ual vocation. That Wicliff enjoyed the advantage of this feeling on the part of the secular authorities is abundantly evident ; he was also sustained and patronized by the great, from higher and nobler motives. The gospel as preached by the reformer early found favor among some of the principal persons of the English court, and was also countenanced by not a few of the chief lords of the kingdom ; so that he did not arouse the wrath of the Papacy before he had fortified himself in the hearts of many who were ready to afford him at least an imperfect security.

Foremost on the list of the friends of Wicliff is the name of John of Gaunt. His favor and support shown to the reformer seem to have originated in some measure from both the motives above named. The encroachments of the Papacy on the authority of the crown had evidently displeased him, and therefore he was prepared to sustain a churchman who declared that such a course was as unlike pure Christianity as it was injurious to the nation. Accordingly so long as the politics of Rome were the subject of animadversion, Lancaster was the steady friend of Wicliff ; but when its doctrines began to be questioned he dreaded to follow further, and reluctantly withdrew his support. To an

enlightened solicitude for the independence of his country, the duke added a high regard for literature, and for literary men. A personal friendship appears thus to have grown up between Wicliff and Lancaster ; still it is painfully evident that the practical teachings of the reformer produced but little effect upon the life and character of the duke.

It is honorable however to Lancaster, that disapproving as he did of some of Wicliff's doctrines, and unprepared as he was to follow his practical precepts, he continued to be known as an admirer of his character, and a friend of his followers. He had listened to the herald of the coming reformation with delighted interest ; and though he found that it demanded of him sacrifices that he was not disposed to make, yet he would not deny nor despise the excellences that he there discovered. More than once, after he refused to accompany the reformer in his opposition to the received notions, as to the eucharist, his authority was successfully employed in behalf of the persecuted ; and down to the time of his death, no Englishman had suffered capitally for alledged heresy. Among his latest acts was a defense, in parliament, of the translation of the Scriptures into English,—which he declared were the property of the people,

which no priesthood ought to be allowed to wrest from them.

Nor was Lancaster the only distinguished person of the age who was known to be favorable to a reformation of the Church of England. His brother, the duke of Gloucester, may be presumed, from the work which Wicliff dedicated to him, to have been friendly to the zeal of the reformer, especially in his opposition to the mendicants. In the number of his friends must also be reckoned the widow of the Black Prince, the mother of the youthful king, a female whose character, equally amiable and commanding, seemed to authorize that interference with the disputes of the period which is frequently noticed in her history. That her friendship to Wicliff was real and decided is evident not only from the favors she rendered him when brought before the synod at Lambeth, but also from her adhering to him in company with those who were opposed to her in some of the political affairs of the kingdom. It might have been expected that the son of such a mother, when he came to the throne, would have been found ready to befriend the reformer, and to favor his cause; but Richard began his career in dependence on the clergy, and accordingly became their instrument in executing their

nefarious and unconstitutional measures of intolerance. To this course, his jealousy toward the duke of Lancaster may have aided in impelling him.

Very different was the case with his queen, Anne of Bohemia, a daughter of the emperor Charles IV. Wicliff commends this excellent lady in high terms, especially for possessing the Scriptures in three languages—the Bohemian, the German, and the Latin. Her attachment to the Scriptures continued till her death, which occurred in 1392; and at her funeral, Arundel, the primate, with an inconsistency worthy of his profession, echoes Wicliff's eulogium, observing, that “although she was a stranger, yet she constantly studied the four Gospels in English, *and explained by the expositions of the doctors*; and in the study of these, and reading of godly books, she was more diligent than even the prelates themselves, though their office and business require this of them.” The use of the Scriptures in English is rather an unusual cause of panegyric from a Romish prelate, though probably, in his opinion, what would have been heresy in a commoner, was commendable in a queen, especially as she is said to have studied the Gospel in English, with the “*expositions of the doctors*.” The queen’s connections with

Germany, and especially with Bohemia, will in some measure explain this attachment to the Scriptures in the vernacular tongue, and the favor with which she is said to have regarded the reformers. Her native country, though among the latest to renounce pagan idolatry, was most obstinate in its resistance to the scarcely less gross superstitions of Rome, and the tales of her persecuted confessors attest their steadfastness in the faith once delivered to them. It is, therefore, nothing surprising that her views of religion were more enlightened than those of most persons of her rank, or, indeed, of persons of any rank in that age. Her attendants during her twelve years' residence in England were natives of Bohemia; and they also appear to have participated in her religious feelings. The mind of Wicliff was one with which the devout Bohemian could readily sympathize; and it is certain, that on their return, after the death of the queen, her attendants conveyed many of the writings of the English reformer to their native land, where they were powerfully effective in preparing the oppressed for the struggle which occurred in the times of Jerome and Huss.

While members of the royal household were found so far to favor the doctrines and the per-

son of Wicliff, it will be readily supposed that he did not fail to find friends and partisans among other privileged classes of his countrymen. He indeed declared, with devout thankfulness, that "many knights favored the Gospel, and had a mind to read it in English;" and it is matter of lamentation with Knighton, the Popish chronicler, that these "having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, often surrounded the false preachers with military bands, that they might not suffer any reproaches or losses on account of their profane doctrine." Persons of rank, at that age, always appeared in arms, and were often attended by armed servants, and, therefore, it is no matter of astonishment that the preachers of the simple truths of the gospel were often surrounded by armed bands of hearers, nor of reproach that they were thus guarded from insults and injuries. We have seen that so early as the year 1377, Lord Percy, the earl marshal, avowed himself the friend of Wicliff, and appeared as such, with the duke of Lancaster, before the synod at St. Paul's. The names of many others, from the highest classes of the nobility and gentry, who openly favored the doctrine of the reformer, could be given. By some of them the images found in the churches subject to their patron-

age were removed, a fact which proves their attachment to the theological, rather than the political, creed of the reformer.

The extent to which the opinions of Wicliff obtained among persons of rank cannot now be precisely ascertained, but it is certain that their favor was of no small service to his cause. For any considerable multiplication of his writings, their wealth was indispensable ; and their power was as necessary to protect the hated works, as their money was to give them existence. If, therefore, it could be shown that the knights of the fourteenth century were, for the most part, unprepared to make any great sacrifices for the sake of the gospel, it is beyond reasonable question, that many of them were so far the friends of good men, and the advocates of religious freedom, as to become the means of saving from oblivion many of the works of the father of the Reformation. These works were of incalculable value to the English nation, for they served as the storehouses of the seeds of the subsequent regeneration of the church, as there is good cause to believe that the fourteenth century was the seed-time of the harvest that was ripe for the sickle in the sixteenth ; and even to the present age they remain as imperishable monuments of

the zeal, piety, and Scriptural orthodoxy of the reformers of that age.

While the upper ranks of society were thus strongly tinctured by an infusion of reformed doctrines, the common people will be readily supposed to have received them in no less degree. If the term Lollard—by which the disciples of Wicliff were known—be meant to comprehend not only those who embraced all the doctrines of the reformer, but also as many as joined in their complaints against existing abuses, we may perhaps safely conclude with Knighton, that in the year 1382 every second man in the kingdom was of that sect. In the Chronicle of that year he remarks, that “their number very much increased, and starting like saplings from the root of a tree, they were multiplied, and filled every place within the compass of the land.” So far had they prevailed, if we give implicit confidence to this writer, as to bring over to their sect “the greater part of the people.” Knighton resided in Leicester, the diocese in which most of the labors of Wicliff were bestowed, and where his assistants also labored most abundantly. There, probably, a majority of the people may have favored the reformer’s opinions, and it is certain that the same

views were more or less prevalent in every portion of the kingdom. The same writer, in attempting to account for the success of these so-called false teachers, remarks, that they "always pretended in their discourses to have great respect for the law of God, to which they declared themselves to be strictly conformed, both in their opinions and in their conduct." This appeal to the Scriptures, as opposed to the rival authority of the church, is said to have deluded many well-meaning people, and induced them to unite with the innovators, lest they should seem to be enemies to the law of God. He further declares of the sect, that, "like their master, they were too eloquent, and too much for other people, in all contentions by word of mouth; that, mighty in words, they exceeded all men in making speeches, out talking every one in litigious disputationes." Again he states, "Both men and women, though never so lately converted to this sect, were distinguished by the same modes of speech, and by a wonderful agreement in the same opinions." These things, though beyond the conceptions of the Popish chronicler, will probably excite no wonder with the reader.

The same motives which render us curious to possess all that may be known respecting

Wicliff's disciples, imparts great interest to whatever may be ascertained concerning his "poor priests," of whom he frequently speaks in terms of high commendation. From the preamble to the persecuting edict, that was so dishonorably obtained by Courtney in 1382, it appears that these laborious teachers were accustomed to journey from town to town, and from county to county, simply attired, and preaching—unlicensed—not only in churches and church-yards, but also in the markets, at the fairs, and, indeed, wherever a company of hearers could be found. When cited by their ecclesiastical superiors to answer for their irregular manners, they are described as treating the authority claimed by such officers with contempt, by disobeying the summons, as they well knew if once they were safely in the hands of their enemies, their only alternatives would be silence and imprisonment; while, by disregarding the citation, they would escape with only spiritual censures, which they had learned to despise. It is further stated, in the same document, that "by their subtil and ingenious words they contrived to draw the people to their sermons, and to maintain them in their errors"—no mean proof, by the by, of their popularity. From all that can now be gathered

upon this subject, it is probable that these “poor priests” constituted a voluntary fraternity, united for the purpose of itinerating through the kingdom, and preaching the gospel to all who would hear them. How far they were organized into a systematic body is unknown; it is probable, however, that they acknowledged some kind of subjection to the rector of Lutterworth, and were directed in their movements by his advice. It is, also, almost certainly ascertained that many of them were educated by Wicliff for that work. At that period it was not difficult to obtain episcopal ordination, and, therefore, these irregular preachers were, for the most part, “priests”—not that they seem to have cared much for the qualification pretended to be conferred by the hands of the prelate, but it became a matter of convenience to them, as opening their ways, and giving them access to the people. They were chiefly distinguished from other priests by their having no benefices, by their holy life, and by their laborious itinerating, and frequent and fervent preaching. Their doctrines were generally the same with those of their master, though, in some few instances, some of them seem to have fallen into vain fancies and wild fanaticisms.

It was to explain these novel proceedings,

and to counteract the designs of the fore-mentioned inquisitorial statute, that Wicliiff published his tract, giving the reasons "Why Poor Priests have no Benefices." Three causes are assigned why they refused to accept benefices: the dread of simony, the fear of misspending poor men's goods, and the hope of doing more good by itinerant labors than by limiting their exertions to a single parish. As to the first, the customs connected with the system of patronage were such as to render it almost impossible to escape the guilt of simony in receiving a benefice. The prelates demanded the first-fruits and other unlawful contributions; and the incumbent was often required to perform some secular duties inconsistent with the life of a priest. Men who would not scruple to conform to such customs, however vicious or incompetent, might readily obtain the care of thousands of souls; "but," he complains, "if there be any simple man who desireth to live well, and to teach truly the law of God, he shall be deemed a hypocrite, a new teacher, a heretic, and not suffered to come to any benefice. If in any little poor place he shall live a poor life, he shall be persecuted and slandered, that he shall be put out by wiles, extortions, frauds, and worldly violence, and imprisoned, or burnt."

While such was the treatment of the conscientious and enlightened among the clergy, though regularly inducted into their offices, lay patrons may well be supposed to have been equally affected by the spirit of irreligion and avarice. He accordingly remarks: "Some lords, to cover their simony, will not take for themselves, but kerchiefs for the lady, or a palfry, or a tun of wine. And when some lords would present a good man, then some ladies are the means of having a dancer presented, or a tripper on tapits, or a hunter, or a hawker, or a wild player of some gambols." Not only does the reformer strongly condemn these nefarious and deleterious practices, but he also presents them as causes why a conscientious priest could not accept a benefice.

The second reason for their conduct is said to be the fear of being compelled to misspend poor men's goods. Whatever of clerical revenue shall remain after food and clothing are provided, is said to come under this denomination. But to be inducted to a living, much gold must be given to a gradation of ecclesiastical officers, and afterward many rich entertainments must be made, sometimes for the gratification of lay patrons, and sometimes as a duty owing to the higher clergy when performing their "feigned

visitations." From such customs it is said to follow that beneficed clergymen may "not spend their tithes and offerings after a good conscience and God's law; but must waste them on the rich and the idle." With such, and even greater difficulties, was the state of a conforming priest beset, so that to accept a benefice almost necessarily led to a participation in the sins of other men. But the want of a benefice did not release one who was truly a priest from the duty of preaching; and when the doors of the churches were closed against them, their voices were raised in its vicinity, or in the highways leading to the towns and villages.

The last reason assigned why "poor priests" have no benefices, and that to which most importance is attached, is, that by such a restriction they should probably "be hindered from better occupation, and from more profiting of holy church." The charge which they had received from above is declared to have respect to men in general, and to be binding wherever there is opportunity to do good, whether by instructions, prayers, or good examples. Of their itinerant habits the reformer observes,—"By this they most surely save themselves and help their brethren; and they are free to fly from one city to another when they are persecuted by

the clerks of antichrist, as Christ biddeth in the gospel. And thus they may best, without any challenging of men, go and dwell among the people where they shall most profit, and, for the time convenient, coming and going after the moving of the Holy Ghost, and not being hindered from doing what is best by the doings of sinful men. Also, they follow Christ and his apostles more, in taking voluntary alms of the people whom they teach, than in taking dimes and offerings by customs, which sinful men have ordained." After more fully defending the course of these itinerant evangelists, the reformer adds:—"Nevertheless, they condemn not curates who do well their office, and dwell where they shall most profit, and teach truly and stably the law of God against false prophets and the cursed deceptions of the fiend." It was not presumed by these zealous innovators, that every possessor of a benefice was necessarily guilty of the sins which they condemned in the practical workings of the ecclesiastical systems. Leaving each to the guidance of his own conscience, and the law of God, they simply asked the privilege of emulating the zeal of the early evangelists, conceiving that office to be less beset by temptation, and more adapted to the wants of the times.

This imperfect sketch of Wicliff's itinerant coadjutors places him before us in a new aspect; for instead of appearing as the prototype of the German reformer of the sixteenth century, he is seen associated in character and mode of action with the English reformer of the eighteenth. Wicliff may indeed, with much propriety, be styled the Wesley of his day. Each of these illustrious servants of God, and benefactors of their race, was the moving spirit of a great reformation—a reformation, however, in both cases, much more of a practical than of a speculative character. Both made their appeal to the masses; and, to carry out their purposes, established an itinerant ministry, composed of members of the national church, but independent of the ecclesiastical system of the country. Wesley lived in more propitious times, and consequently saw more fully the fruits of his labors, and likewise gave greater stability to his peculiar system of religious action; though it is probable that no inconsiderable impression was made upon the church and kingdom by the “poor priests.”

Wicliff's doctrines continued to be efficiently active long after his death. His disciples, known in church history as Lollards, were found in every part of the kingdom in such

numbers, and actuated by so much zeal, that they became terrible to the hierarchy. A universal deluge of “heretical pravity” began to be apprehended, and the most active precautionary measures, that perverse ingenuity could invent, and diabolical cruelty execute, were resorted to. A most fearful persecution was raging at the time of the reformer’s death ; and was long continued with unabated violence. The first point of attack was the writings of Wicliff and his disciples, which, in the form of small tracts, had been widely disseminated, and were exerting an extensive leavening influence. Yet the work continued to spread, and more stringent measures were called for. The stake and fagot were then first brought to the aid of Catholic uniformity. From that time the story of Wicliff’s disciples is one of suffering, patience, and blood. His doctrines were suppressed, but not extinguished ; and the seed sown by his hands, and the tender plants that had sprung up, endured the fierce storms of a winter of two centuries, and were yet alive when the spring-time of the gospel returned at the Reformation.

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